

# Different Historical Prisms and Regressive Political Reconciliation in Northeast Asia\*

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| Abstract |

The aims of this paper are to take stock of the current development of political reconciliation in Northeast Asia at the levels of government and citizenry, and to explore a critical impediment to political reconciliation, despite increasingly complex interdependence in the region. This paper argues that different (if not incompatible) historical prisms are central to explaining the current regression of political reconciliation in Northeast Asia. It is also argued that, without any sensitivity to different historical prisms of China, Japan and South Korea, mainstream international relations

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theories are insufficient to explain the complexity of Northeast Asian international relations today.

▪ Key words: IR theory, Reconciliation, History, Asian Paradox, Northeast Asia

## I . Introduction

Northeast Asian international relations (IR) today can be succinctly depicted as “warm economics and cold politics” (Green 2014, 204). In a similar vein, South Korean President Park Geun-hye contends that “Asia suffers from ... ‘the Asian paradox,’ the disconnect between growing economic interdependence on the one hand, and backward political, security cooperation on the other”.<sup>1)</sup> Deepening complex interdependence among China, South Korea and Japan has little positive impact on political reconciliation in the region. Political reconciliation among peoples in Northeast Asia is not simply stagnant, but regressive recently. This disconnection between ‘icy’ high and ‘hot’ low politics in Northeast Asia – the Asian paradox – defies mainstream IR theories. For realists, international relations is a zero-sum game in which states care more about relative gains than absolute gains (Friedberg 2012, 49-58; Mearsheimer 2013, 77-93). A state often seeks national interests of its own at the expense of the interests of other states (Dunne & Schmidt 2011, 84-99; Lebow 2013, 59-76). Realism “depicts international affairs as a struggle for power among self-interested states and is generally pessimistic about the prospects for eliminating conflict and war” (Walt 1998, 31). It is thus difficult for realism to explain the

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1) Shin, Gi-wook (2014), “National Identities, Historical Memories, and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia,” <http://www.theasanforum.org/national-identities-historical-memories-and-reconciliation-in-northeast-asia/>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

seemingly contradictory simultaneity between complex interdependence and security competition in Northeast Asia. Liberalists believe that international relations can be a realm of progress and purposive change, overcoming what seems to be the constancy of conflict and warfare in international affairs (Ikenberry 2011, 56–68; Russett 2013). Most essentially, liberalism emphasizes the ‘spillover’ effect in international politics, which argues that cooperative interactions in low politics (economy and culture) can spillover into high politics (diplomacy and security), thereby bringing about positive changes, as shown in the case of the European Union (Haas 2004). And yet, regressive political reconciliation along with deepening interdependence, interconnectedness, and institutions in the region cast a vexing question to liberalism in the context of Northeast Asia. Regarding constructivism, culture in international politics is constituted by social interactions of states, which can be positive or negative in nature (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001, 391–416; Katzenstein 1996). This suggests that for constructivists, unlike for realists, anarchy is not necessarily conflict-based in an essentialist sense, but rather that “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt 1992, 391–425). To achieve international peace, therefore, a culture of friendliness among states should be constructed through the positive social interactions of states, and this culture will further contribute to more peaceful international politics (Wendt 1999). However, constructivism seems to have difficulty in fully addressing the questions of why positive social interactions (complex interdependence) continue to coincide with negative social interactions (regressive political reconciliation), and which culture – among Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian cultures – is forming under such circumstances in Northeast Asia. After all, all mainstream IR theories provide only half the story of Northeast Asian IR today (Acharya 2008, 57–82; Acharya & Buzan 2010).

Regarding Northeast Asian unique IR practice today – the Asian paradox – which is vexing mainstream IR theories, the aim of this paper is twofold. The first is to take stock of the current development of political reconciliation in Northeast Asia at the levels of government and citizenry. Second, the paper attempts to explore a critical factor that perpetuates the Asian paradox while impeding political reconciliation in the region, by looking at two contentious obstacles to political reconciliation in Northeast Asia. The issues are Japan's apologies for its imperial wartime past and its compensation for sexual slaves (comfort women). This paper argues that different (if not incompatible) historical prisms are central to explaining the recent regression of political reconciliation in Northeast Asia. In conjunction with this, mainstream IR theories have much to say about Northeast Asian IR, but the usefulness and fit of mainstream theories for Northeast Asia are only reliable when they are sufficiently sensitive to critical contextual factors such as historical prisms, and how history informs Northeast Asian state identities and interests on an ongoing basis.

This paper consists of five sections. The next section discusses signs of the regression of political reconciliation in Northeast Asia at the levels of government and citizenry. The third section examines two specific issues – Japan's apology and compensation – which make it difficult for countries in the region to achieve political reconciliation. The fourth section explores the different historical prisms of Japan and South Korea and China regarding Japan's wartime past, which is followed by the concluding section.

## II. Signs of the Regression of Political Reconciliation in Northeast Asia

### 1. Stalled Progress in Regularized Trilateral Relationships

The first South Korea–Japan–China trilateral summit took place on the sidelines of the ASEAN+3 meeting in November of 1999, and up until 2001, the trilateral summit was held in the form of closed breakfast sessions. During the eighth ASEAN+3 convention, in November of 2007, the three countries agreed to hold summits separately from the ASEAN, and thus formed the structural foundation of three-way cooperation, which they initiated and sustained by themselves. The first trilateral summit kicked off in December of 2008 in Fukuoka, Japan, where a joint communiqué for partnership among South Korea, China, and Japan was signed by the leaders. The three countries took turns hosting the summit meetings annually until May of 2012. In addition, since 2007, the foreign ministers of the three countries have been taking turns hosting official ministerial meetings every year. Most impressive, South Korea, Japan and China established a Seoul-based Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) to support three-way summits, ministerial meetings, and other projects between the governments in September of 2011. The budget of the TCS is shared by each government, and its decisions are made by consensus of the Board, which consists of the Secretary General and two Deputy Generals from the three countries. The TCS is significant because it has created “procedural foundations” for trilateral collaboration and thus has attempted to institutionalize trilateral cooperation while seeking political reconciliation.<sup>2)</sup>

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2) Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (2014), “TCS Overview,” <http://www.tcs-asia>.

However, all the efforts to formalize these meetings and to foster cooperation have been in vain over the past few years due to diplomatic spats regarding historical and territorial disputes, such as the abovementioned issues of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands and Dokdo/Takeshima island, the Japanese Prime Minister's visit to Yasukuni Shrine, the comfort women issue, and other issues. These diplomatic standoffs have deepened mistrust and resentment among the countries in the region, and have increased the likelihood of military conflict in Northeast Asia (*BBC* 2014/11/10).<sup>3)</sup> Although the first summit after 3-year suspension between China, Japan, and South Korea took place in November 2015, it did not really produce any concrete ways of fixing regressive political reconciliation while simply agreeing to accelerate for a trilateral free-trade agreement and bolster cultural exchanges. The reason for regularizing various channels of cooperation is to prevent trilateral relations from turning sour due to short-term political and diplomatic issues. As mentioned, the three countries have also built other procedural methods to allow smooth communication and cooperation. Although all the agreed upon institutional arrangements are designed to manage diplomatic tensions and security concerns in Northeast Asia, the measures have not realized what they are supposed to achieve - namely, the prevention of regional instability - let alone true political reconciliation.

## 2. Recent Societal Change: Degenerative Public Perceptions

Signs of the regression of reconciliation are clearly visible in the changes in public opinion in the three countries. A survey conducted

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org/index.php. (accessed on December 1, 2014)

3) Smith, Sheila A. (2013). "A Sino-Japanese Clash in the East China Sea," <http://www.cfr.org/japan/sino-japanese-clash-east-china-sea/p30504>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

by Kono and Hara (2011) for Japan's Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japan Broadcasting Center, NHK) and South Korea's Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) showed that more Japanese respondents "disliked" South Korea in 1991 than "liked" it. Although in 1999 there was an increase in the number of respondents who "disliked" South Korea, in 2010 more Japanese people said they "liked" their neighbor than said they "disliked" their neighbor. In South Korea, by contrast, in 1991 58% of survey participants "disliked" Japan, and this figure gradually increased in 1999 and 2010.<sup>4)</sup> Another poll, conducted by Japan's Genron NPO and South Korea's East Asia Institute in May of 2013, asked respondents questions about "changes in the two countries' relations over the past year." Of the Japanese respondents, 66.3% believed that bilateral ties "had gotten worse" (this figure includes responses of both "have gotten much worse" and "have gotten relatively worse"), while 53.9% of South Korean respondents ticked the same boxes.<sup>5)</sup>

From January to November of 2013, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies surveyed South Koreans every two months. The results of this research echoed previous surveys, with 82.1% of South Korean respondents reporting that South Korea-Japan relations had deteriorated.<sup>6)</sup> This mistrust is spreading among the youth of South Korea in particular. According to a survey conducted by the Korean Teachers' and Education Workers' Union, 79.6% of high school students agreed that "there are many problems regarding relations between the two countries." Many cited historical issues, such as the "territorial

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4) Kono, K. and M. Hara (2011), "Japan-Korea Past, Present, and Future: From a Public Awareness Survey," [https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/english/reports/pdf/rep\\_or\\_t\\_111201-1.pdf](https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/english/reports/pdf/rep_or_t_111201-1.pdf). (accessed on September 11, 2016)

5) Genron NPO/East Asia Institute (2013), "Japan-Korea Public Opinion Poll, Analysis Report on the Comparative Data," [http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng\\_report/2015\\_061912332246.pdf](http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/2015_061912332246.pdf). (accessed on September 11, 2016)

6) Asan Policy Institute (2014), "Two Perspectives on Japan," <http://asaninst.org>. (accessed on April 7, 2014)

disputes over Dokdo/Takeshima” and “forced prostitution of military comfort women in Korea during World War II” as key reasons. What is more interesting than the pessimistic take of students on the current situation, however, is their view on the prospects for the future. The vast majority of students (95.5%) reported an expectation of disagreement between the two nations in the future. Students from South Korea and Japan responded that they felt bilateral relations would continue to be strained. Only 22% of South Korean students thought that relations with Japan would improve in the future,<sup>7)</sup> while 34.6% of Japanese and 59.5% of South Korean students believed that bilateral relations “would not change” in the future.<sup>8)</sup> This pessimistic public perception of one another may be an indication of the rough path ahead to realize political reconciliation between South Korea and Japan.

As for Sino-Japanese relations, according to a survey by the Japanese government, the number of Japanese respondents reporting that they felt “friendly” toward China hit record lows. The number of Japanese people who lack an “affinity” for China now exceeds the number of Japanese people with positive feelings for the country by a factor of over four-to-one. This is the lowest level recorded since the Japanese government began the survey in 2000. Similarly, the perceptions and feeling of the Japanese and Chinese public toward one another have worsened across the board in the past nine years. The latest survey shows that 80% of the Japanese citizens polled and 90% of the Chinese citizens polled believe that Japan-China relations are “bad.” Both figures are the worst results in the past nine surveys. The percentage of people foreseeing better relations between the two countries came to only about 10% among both the Japanese and

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7) Ibid.

8) Genron NPO/East Asia Institute (2013), Op. cit.



Chinese citizens polled. Conversely, the percentage of Japanese citizens expecting even worse bilateral relations in the years ahead increased to 28.3%. The comparable percentage on the Chinese side also grew to 45.3%, indicating the spread of pessimistic views regarding the course of Japan–China relations on both sides. Seventy-five percent of Japanese respondents have negative views of Sino–Japanese relations. They think that Sino–Japanese relations will deteriorate under the Abe administration. Even worse, more than half of Chinese citizens expect their country to be at war with Japan in as little as six years. About 53% of Chinese respondents and 29% of Japanese respondents expected a war to break out by the year 2020. The favorability ratings of both countries for one another remain at historic lows. Ninety-three percent of Japanese respondents reported having a negative impression of China, which is the worst rating in the survey’s ten-year history, while 87% of Chinese people responded negatively to Japan. In short, public perceptions between South Korea and Japan, and China and Japan have degenerated, which casts a negative outlook on political reconciliation in Northeast Asia.

### **III. Bones of Contention between Japan and South Korea and China: Apology and Compensation**

#### **1. Japan’s Repeated but Forgotten Apologies**

Publicly apologizing for a country’s past wrongdoings is seen as an attempt to repair and rebuild damaged international relationships after a long history of animosity, conflict, and suffering. When apologies

include taking responsibility for past wrongdoings and expressing regret, they have the potential to rebuild trust, or at least to appease anger and mitigate distrust between enemies (Yamazaki 2006). Apologies can thus be a stepping stone to political reconciliation, as famously shown in Franco-German relations after WWII. Yet, not all apologies lead to successful political reconciliation, because reconciliation is not a one-way but rather a dyadic process, which means that the response of the recipient of an apology is critical. In this way, a successful apology requires a recipient who is willing to accept it. Without receptivity, the apology falls on deaf ears. Apologies between countries are far more complex than apologies between individuals, because the audience is comprised of numerous groups with different expectations who are in various geographical locations (Yamazaki 2006, 21).

In the past, Japan has made apologies to South Korea for the damage Japan caused during its colonial occupation of Korea. Two major examples are the 1995 Murayama and 1993 Kono statements. The Murayama statement was delivered by then-Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama based on a decision by his cabinet. The statement has been seen as an apology to the victims of Japanese aggression in WWII. Named after former Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono, the Kono statement in 1993 offered an apology for the sexual enslavement of the women of neighboring countries. In 2010, on the one hundredth anniversary of Japan's annexation of Korea, Prime Minister Naoto Kan apologized for his nation's role in decades of harsh colonial rule. Kan apologized to the South Korean people for Japan's past transgressions. In a statement endorsed by his cabinet, Kan said, "for the enormous damage and suffering caused by this colonization, I would like to express once again our deep regret and sincere apology" (*Joongang Daily* 2010/08/10). Kan's remarks differed

slightly from the groundbreaking 1995 Murayama statement, because they were directed exclusively at South Korea and, for the first time, recognized that the peninsula was annexed “against the will of the Korean people” (*Joongang Daily* 2010/08/10).

The South Korean government welcomed Kan’s apology. Foreign Ministry spokesman Kim Young-sun said, “we recognize Prime Minister Kan’s statement that Japan wished to frankly look back on its past mistakes and expect the Japanese people to share this view” (*Los Angeles Times* 2010/08/11; *Guardian* 2010/08/10). However, the citizens of South Korea had a different take on the formal apology. Many South Koreans were not convinced that the apology was sincere or sufficient. “An apology is better than nothing, but if they are truly sorry, they should provide compensation for all victims of the colonization, including the former sex slaves” (*Los Angeles Times* 2010/08/15). The main sentiments expressed by South Koreans were that “the Japanese government needs to show action, not just some words on a piece of paper” and “the statement is only half complete as it apologizes for the annexation against the will of the Korean people but fails to mention the illegality of their actions” (*Los Angeles Times* 2010/08/15). According to a survey published on March 28, 2013 by the Korean Teachers’ and Education Workers’ Union, 96.4% of respondents still think the Japanese government should apologize to South Korea for its past misdeeds (*Xinhua* 2013/02/20).

Similar sentiments can be found regarding Sino-Japanese relations. In 2005, the Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi expressed “deep remorse” at a summit of Asian and African leaders in Jakarta. At the summit’s opening ceremony, Koizumi said that “in the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering for the people of many countries, particularly those of Asian nations.” The delivery of this remark at the international

gathering was clearly aimed at easing an escalating row with China over Tokyo's handling of its wartime atrocities. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan said China welcomed Koizumi's apology, but he pointed out that the apology did not go beyond anything that previous Japanese leaders had already said.

The "Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China," which was signed on September 29, 1972, uses an ambiguous vocabulary. It argues, for instance, that "[t]he Japanese side is keenly conscious of the responsibility for the serious damage that Japan caused in the past to the Chinese people through war and deeply reproaches itself." Here, the non-specific use of the word "war" denotes Japanese responsibility for causing an unspecified amount of damage during an unspecified period - despite the violent events that occurred during both the Second World War and the Sino-Japanese War of 1937. The Japan-China Joint Declaration on Building a Partnership of Friendship and Cooperation for Peace and Development, signed on November 26, 1998, also uses ambiguous vocabulary. For example, the declaration states:

Both sides believe that squarely facing the past and correctly understanding history is an important foundation for the further development of relations between Japan and China. ... The Japanese side is keenly conscious of its responsibility for the serious distress and damage that Japan caused to the Chinese people through its aggression against China during a certain period in the past, and it expresses deep remorse for this.<sup>9)</sup>

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9) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1972), "Joint Communiqué of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China," <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/joint72.html>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

It is important to note the usage of terms “serious distress and damage,” “aggression,” and a “certain period in the past.” There is no clarification of what type of “aggression” caused this “serious damage.” Despite a substantial body of evidence supporting, for instance, the biochemical tests of Japanese Unit 731, the Nanjing massacre, the mobilization of forced labor, and the use of sex slaves, the declaration merely uses benign words such as “damage” and “aggression.” Moreover, instead of using phrases that define concepts such as war or colonial rule, the declaration uses the ambiguous phrase, “certain period,” to avoid clearly placing these actions in history. The Japan–China joint declaration of 1998, signed 26 years later after the first joint communiqué between China and Japan, also uses the term “certain period” in describing past wrongs. In the cases of both China–Japan and South Korea–Japan relations, there exists a perceptual gap between Japan’s acts of apology and the acceptance of the apologies by both China and South Korea. Japan’s repeated apologies have made little progress toward improving political reconciliation in Northeast Asia.

## 2. Discrepancies in Satisfaction Levels regarding Compensation

Compensation policies for the victims of wartime sex crimes tend to be high on the agenda when discussing how Japan should atone for its wartime misdeeds. One major example of this is the Asia Women’s Fund (AWF), which was established to provide compensation for the wartime trade of “comfort women”. The AWF has provoked considerable repercussions in South Korea. The sex slave issue has become part of an international agenda, receiving attention and criticism from the international community. The issue has tarnished the international reputation of Japan, which is a country that wants be

respected as a moral nation in the world. In 1994, Japan proposed a resolution to the comfort women issue. At the Foreign Affairs Committee meeting of Japan's House of Councilors on June 22, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Koji Kakizawa, proposed a bill to compensate the former sex slaves using private funds. Kakizawa provided details of the "private good will" in a clause on pan-Japanese cooperation, stating that "the Japanese people, who are the perpetrators of past war aggression, understand the obligations of the Japanese government and its people, agree not to repeat such crimes, and will cooperate to collect donations to compensate the victims".<sup>10)</sup> He made it clear that the Japanese government would provide financial support for only administrative expenses, such as operations and publicity costs. The rest of the money would come from funds raised by a private foundation for the cause.

On August 31 of the same year, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama announced a special plan that mentioned "a path toward nationwide participation".<sup>11)</sup> The focal point of this plan was the Japanese government's refusal to compensate the victims directly, and its desire to instead resolve the issue by establishing a fund of 100 billion yen to conduct research projects and exchange programs. In December, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) announced their final proposal, which suggested that the Japanese government compensate its victims "from a moral standpoint" and "with nationwide participation" by collecting funds to resolve the "compensation and property claims" of the survivors of wartime sex crimes (Chung 2008). This proposal confirmed Japan's stance that the government would not compensate

10) Etsuro, Totsuke (2013), "Proposal for Japan and the ROK to resolve the 'Comfort Women' issue," <http://apjff.org/2013/11/1/Totsuka-Etsuro/3885/article.html>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

11) Soh, Sarah C. (2001), "Japan's Responsibility toward Comfort Women Survivors," <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp77.html>. (accessed on April 7, 2014)

individual victims. In addition, the government-level official position of Japan is that the 1965 Basic Treaty between Japan and South Korea resolved all wartime compensation issues.

In June of 1995, Murayama's cabinet developed a proposal to establish the Asia Peace and Friendship Fund for Women, leaving Japan's abovementioned official position on wartime compensation issues intact.<sup>12)</sup> In July of 1995, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kozo Igarashi announced the details of the AWF. Accordingly, even though the AWF is not government-level compensation per se, it is the Japanese government's way of handling compensation for wartime comfort women. The specifics of the AWF are as follows. First, the AWF planned to compensate former comfort women with the use of private funds. Second, the Japanese government was to provide financial support to raise private funds and to provide medical care for former comfort women. Third, the AWF was to extend a sincere apology to the victims. Fourth, the AWF was to collect historical truths. Fifth, the AWF was to carry out other plans to protect the dignity of women on an ongoing basis. Funds raised by non-government organizations (NGOs) were to be used to give individual former sex slaves two million yen in compensation, and another three million yen for medical care, accompanied by a letter of apology signed by the prime minister.<sup>13)</sup>

However, the AWF faced a backlash in both Japan and South Korea. Critics said Japan was using private funds in order to avoid providing an official apology and compensation. Japanese and South Korean civil societies called it an act of arrogation, meaning that civilians had apologized on behalf of the state, thereby obscuring the party that should be held responsible. The Japanese government appeared to have

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12) Ibid.

13) Asian Women's Fund (2007). "The 'Comfort Women' Issue and the Asia Women's Fund," <http://www.awf.or.jp/pdf/0170.pdf>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

passed the buck to its civil society. The fund also failed to seek the forgiveness of the victims. The surviving victims should have been both the agents and the subjects of compensation, and they should have been the adjudicators of the fund's success. Unfortunately, the former sex slaves were not offered any chance to lend their voices to the cause of the AWF. The fund was thus criticized for doling out only what the Japanese government wanted to give and was able to give, instead of graciously providing what the victims had asked for (*BBC* 2007/04/10).

Another important issue in the AWF controversy was the inclusion of Japan's formal apology. When the AWF delivered the first "atonement money" to four Filipino survivors in August of 1996, it also sent letters from both Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and AWF President Bunbei Hara. Hashimoto's letter included phrases such as "apology and remorse" and "women's honor and dignity," without any reference to the war of aggression or colonial domination. Japanese civil activists found fault with the phrase, "my personal feelings," in Hashimoto's letter, pointing out that these words conveyed the feelings of one individual rather than the position of the Japanese government. It is not known why the term "personal" was used in the official English translation of the Japanese phrase "watashi no kimochi," which means "my feeling," but from 1998 onwards, when Keizo Obuchi succeeded Hashimoto as prime minister, the English version of the letter no longer contained the word "personal".<sup>14)</sup>

There was another crucial change in the revised letter of Obuchi. In the official Korean version, the word "apology" is translated as "sajoe" ("shazai" in Japanese). "Sagwa" is more commonly used to mean apology, while "sajoe" is a stronger term that implies that one admits to a crime, rather than just a mistake. Except for a few undisclosed

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14) Soh, Sarah C. (2001), *Op. cit.*



recipients of the AWF's atonement money, however, almost no one in South Korea was aware of this change in wording. Procedures of the AWF cannot be performed publicly, largely due to strong objections raised by the Korean Council and the survivors themselves.<sup>15)</sup> Most of the South Korean media did not report on the word change in the letter, focusing instead on the "enemy vs. victim" aspects of the story. Thus due to limited information, South Koreans had no way of knowing that the Japanese government had selected the meaningful term "sajoe" for its official apology. In addition, South Korean and Japanese governments agreed to settle the comfort women issue in December 2015, yet a serious backlash has broken out in South Korea. For South Korean public, the deal failed to state the legal liability of the Japanese government and there was a lack of consultation with victims during the negotiation process (*BBC* 2015/12/28; *Wall Street Journal* 2016/01/03).

The past apologies of Japan were rejected by South Korean victims and society because South Korea believed that if Japan had been sincere about resolving the sex slave issue, then Japan would have offered government-level compensation by enacting special laws to compensate for the misdeeds of colonial rule (Zuchiko 2008). From the South Korean point of view, the 1965 treaty with Japan to settle postwar compensation claims was not sufficient to stop individuals from seeking compensation from Japan. While the Japanese government believed that sufficient compensation and an appropriate apology had been provided to South Korean former sex slaves, these expiations were not in the form that South Korean victims wanted, and Japan was not recognized for its efforts.

In the case of China, the Japanese government did not establish any laws or funds to compensate Chinese civilian victims of the

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15) Ibid.

Sino-Japanese war. These victims had to file individual lawsuits for compensation. Many private organizations were formed in the 1990s to support war victims in their pursuit of compensation lawsuits. Non-government organizations such as the Society to Support the Demands of Chinese War Victims were established in Japan. This society carried out an international letter campaign in support of the “Nanjing Massacre, Unit 731, and Indiscriminate Bombing” lawsuit. Scholars, lawyers, and NGOs conducted large-scale research and investigations to clarify historical facts, and provided necessary data to war victims. In 2001, a civilian court in the Hague ruled in favor of the sex slaves and recognized Japan’s responsibility for operating the comfort women system. However, the vast majority of civilian compensation lawsuits failed to achieve satisfying results, and only a few trials facilitated reconciliation (Nozaki & Inokuchi 2000).

Winning a trial at the district-court level does not always lead to the same results in the High Court. Some lawsuits lost in the High Court after winning at the district-court level, such as the lawsuit against Nishimatsu Construction. The Supreme Court dismissed claims made by conscripted Chinese laborers who were forced to work for Nishimatsu Construction during the Hiroshima prefecture. The five Chinese nationals who were forced into hard labor at a hydroelectric power generator construction site claimed damages worth 27 million yen against Nishimatsu Construction. However, on April 27, 2007, Japan’s High Court dismissed their claim. The judges totally dismissed all judicial remedies put forward by the victims by ruling that all post-war compensation issues were resolved when the joint communiqué was signed between China and Japan, and thus, that individuals did not have the right to claim damages in court. Due to the High Court’s ruling, the Chinese plaintiffs lost more than twenty lawsuits related to post-war compensation.<sup>16)</sup> A spokesperson for the

Chinese Foreign Ministry, Liu Jianchao, commented on the decisions made by the High Court, saying:

The waiver of war reparations claims made by China against Japan in the China–Japan Joint Communiqué was a political decision undertaken with the aim of achieving amity and coexistence between the peoples of both countries. The interpretation of the China–Japan Joint Communiqué by the Japanese Supreme Court is illegal and invalid ... The Chinese government has already requested that Japan effect an adequate resolution with a responsible attitude toward history (*Xinhuanet* 2007/04/28).

A Japanese court also refused compensation for Chinese victims of some of Imperial Japan's most notorious atrocities, including the Nanjing Massacre. The Tokyo High Court said that the government compensated governments, not individuals, for past wrongdoings. "Under international law, individual war victims do not have a right to directly seek compensation from a warring nation," presiding Judge Masahito Monguchi said. "Under civil law, the country does not bear responsibility either" (*China Daily* 2005/06/07). The outcome of the lawsuit regarding Unit 731 was similar. A Japanese high court rejected appeals by 180 Chinese citizens demanding compensation for damages caused by Japan's World War II germ warfare program. The plaintiffs filed the case in 1997, demanding an apology and \$89,300 USD each from the Japanese government. In an August 2002 ruling, the Tokyo District Court acknowledged that Japan used biological weapons before and during WWII. However, the court rejected the demands of the

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16) Library of Congress (2008), "Japan: WWII POW and Forced Labor Compensation Cases," <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/pow-compensation/Japan-pow-compensation.pdf>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

Chinese plaintiffs, saying that foreign citizens could not seek compensation directly from the Japanese government under international law. The court also said that Japan had already paid compensation under postwar peace treaties (*China Daily* 2005/07/19).

The logic behind Japan's argument is based on Article 5 of the 1972 Japan–China Joint Communiqué, which helped normalize ties between the two countries. The relevant clause asserts that, “the Government of the People’s Republic of China declares that in the interest of the friendship between the Chinese and the Japanese peoples, it renounces its demand for war reparations from Japan.” The court also found that for its part, Japan believed that the issues of war reparations and claims had already been settled under the 1965 Japan–South Korea treaty.<sup>17)</sup> Regardless, Japan’s persistent refusal to provide compensation from government funds to wartime victims such as comfort women and forced laborers contributes to an image of a nation that does not sincerely acknowledge its past wrongdoings and seek to correct them, thereby leading to the loss of international standing.

#### IV. Competing Historical Prisms of Japan’s Wartime Past in Northeast Asia

As discussed, Japan has made apologies, ambiguous though they are in terms of content and ways of delivery, for its past wrongdoings. In addition, Japan has tried to work out its own way of compensating

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17) Asada and Ryan (2009), “Post-war Reparations between Japan and China and Individual Claims: The Supreme Court Judgments in the Nishimatsu Construction Case and the Second Chinese ‘Comfort Women’ Case,” [https://sydney.edu.au/law/anjel/documents/ZJapanR/ZJapanR27/ZJapanR27\\_22\\_Asada%20Ryan.pdf](https://sydney.edu.au/law/anjel/documents/ZJapanR/ZJapanR27/ZJapanR27_22_Asada%20Ryan.pdf). (accessed on September 11, 2016)

former comfort women (though not forced laborers) for the suffering of these individuals under Japan's wartime past. Why, then, are Japan's repeated apologies and gestures of compensation often forgotten, and even rejected, in South Korean and Chinese societies? In other words, why do South Korean and Chinese people believe that Japan's apologies and proffered compensation are not sincere or sufficient? From the perspective of both the South Korean and Chinese public, there is great incongruity between the parlance and deeds of Japan.

One major example is the repeated visits of responsible Japanese politicians (particularly, former and current prime ministers of Japan) to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors millions of people that have died in war, including 14 Class A War criminals convicted after WWII by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. These 14 criminals are seen, in South Korea and China, as warmongers responsible for Japan's atrocities in Asia during the early twentieth century (*CBS News* 2013/04/22). More to the point, as aptly claimed by Fukuyama,<sup>18)</sup> the real concern is the Yashukan Museum next door to the shrine, which glorifies Japan's wartime past and glosses over the unbearable suffering it inflicted on its Asian neighbors. "The problem is that the Yashukan is the only museum in contemporary Japan dealing with Japan's twentieth century history, and that successive governments have hidden behind the fact that it is run by a religious foundation to protect the museum's status" (Fukuyama 2007, 39). A selective, inscriptive memory of pre-war imperial Japan's greatness, which is embodied in the Yasukuni shrine, does not resonate with Japan's repeated apologies to its Asian neighbors. South Korea and China see the Yasukuni Shrine as a potent symbol of how the Japanese military junta, intoxicated by fascism, racial superiority over Asian peoples, and

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18) Fukuyama, Francis (2007), "The Trouble with Japanese Nationalism," <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-trouble-with-japanese-nationalism?barrier=true>. (accessed on September 11, 2016).

the divinity of the Emperor, invaded and colonized Asia in many brutal ways. In this context, South Korean and Chinese people regard the pilgrimage of high-level Japanese politicians (including prime ministers) to Yasukuni, in tribute, as a blatant denial of the repeated apologies of Japan to South Korea and China (*South China Morning Post* 2014/08/15).

Despite international sensitivity to this issue, former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi paid his respects at the Yasukuni shrine a couple of times in the 2000s. More recently, current Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited the shrine in 2013, and sent a ritual offering to the shrine in 2014. Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso and Senior Vice Foreign Minister Nobuo Kishi (who is the Prime Minister's brother) are among those who have paid visits to the controversial shrine since Abe returned to power. All these actions are politically symbolic, and are sure to offend South Korea and China. Against the criticism of South Korea and China regarding the issue of the Yasukuni shrine, Koizumi rebutted that "I go there [the Yasukuni shrine] to remember and reflect on past wars, and renew our resolve never go to war again" (*BBC* 2006/08/15). Likewise, after his televised visit to the shrine in 2013, Abe told the reporters that "there is criticism based on the misconception that this is an act to worship war criminals, but I visited Yasukuni Shrine to report to the souls of the war dead on the progress made this year and to convey my resolve that people never again suffer the horrors of war" (*Reuters* 2014/10/17). Regardless, this pledge of peace at a site that glorifies war has been seen as a mockery to South Korea and China.

Another recent example of why South Korea and China remain suspicious of the sincerity of Japan's apologies is Japan's elusive, inconsistent stance toward the issue of comfort women. In recent years, more and more Japanese politicians have repeatedly attempted to

undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the Kono and Murayama statements, while superficially upholding the statements as the official government position due to pressure from the US (*Japan Times* 2013/07/13).<sup>19)</sup> On November 4, 2012, a number of Japanese public figures ran an advertisement in an American newspaper denying that the Japanese military had coerced the “comfort women” into sexual slavery. The advertisement provided links to “the Nanjing Hoax” and similar articles (*Star Ledger* 2012/11/04). The South Korean media has reported that Japanese diplomats complained to the officials of Palisades Park, a town in New Jersey, regarding a small memorial in a public park to the victims of sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese military. The complaint occurred under the administration of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), led by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, demonstrating that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is not the only source of hostility to the Murayama and Kono statements (*New York Times* 2012/05/18). Responding to the question of “Do you accept that there was [wartime sexual] coercion for some women?” in an interview with *The Economist* in 2014, Abe stated that the line of the Japanese government is that “there was no evidence proving that there was an outfit abducting women or coercing the women in that way” (*Economist* 2014/12/05). This comment contradicts the Kono statement, which acknowledges and apologizes for Japan’s “administrative/military personnel directly taking part in the recruitment of comfort women”.<sup>20)</sup> Former Education Minister Nariaki Nakayama declared his pride in the fact that the LDP had succeeded in removing

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19) Gustafsson, Karl (2013), “Japanese Prime Minister Abe’s U-turn on the Murayama Statement,” <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/05/31/japanese-prime-minister-abes-u-turn-on-the-murayama-statement/>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

20) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (1993), “Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono on the Result of the Study on the Issue of ‘Comfort Women,’” <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/women/fund/state9308.html>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)

references to “wartime sex slaves” from most of the authorized history textbooks of public junior high schools in Japan. Nakayama added, “it might be said that the occupation was something they [the comfort women] could take pride in given that their existence soothed the distraught feelings of men in the battlefield and provided a certain respite and order” (Yoshihumi 1999). In 2013, Abe proposed a possible revision of the Murayama statement. His administration as a whole, however, reluctantly decided to uphold the original statement after considering the domestic and international context, and the consequences of revising it.<sup>21)</sup> Yet, Abe argued that what is dubbed “aggression” in the Murayama statement may be understood differently, depending on what side a person is on. Thus it seems clear that two pillars of the arc of Japanese apology for its historical wrongdoings – the Kono and Murayama statements – have come under serious duress from Japan itself.

The above two examples show a perceptual gulf between South Korea and China and Japan in terms of how to understand Japan’s wartime past. This gulf would appear to perpetuate the recent regression of political reconciliation, despite the gains in cultural and economic interdependence among the countries of Northeast Asia. Indeed, a nation’s history is not simply a descriptive thing of the past. Instead, national history informs the notion of state identity in terms of describing to a people who they are and what they should do in the present. History is prescriptive, often implying and facilitating a particular relationship between the concepts of “us” and “them”. Although history is not a perfect blueprint for the future, it provides certain guidelines about how we view and react to others on an ongoing basis. Accordingly, any given way of remembering (or

21) Gustafsson, Karl (2013), “Japanese Prime Minister Abe’s U-turn on the Murayama Statement,” <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/05/31/japanese-prime-minister-abes-u-turn-on-the-murayama-statement/>. (accessed on September 11, 2016)



forgetting) the past often serves as a solid foundation for (or obstacle against) political reconciliation between enduring foes and rivals. In this context, it is necessary to examine the ways in which South Korea and China on one hand, and Japan on the other, differently remember (and forget) Japan's wartime past. South Korea and China understand Japan's wartime past through a dualistic prism of victim/perpetrator relations. This prism has a clear moral distinction, which is that South Korea and China are the victims of Japan's militaristic imperialism, and Japan is undeniably the perpetrator. For South Korea, Japan's colonial rule of Korea was illegal and contrary to the will of Korean people. What imperial Japan did to Korea (including atrocities such as comfort women and forced laborers) is understood to be state-sanctioned crimes. Likewise, for China, Japan's invasion of China is remembered as an unprovoked attack, with the Nanjing Massacre and the biological and chemical experiments of Japanese military Unit 731 deemed as nothing less than state crimes against humanity. This prism of perspective thus maintains that Japan must admit its past wrongdoings with no reservation. Japan must sincerely apologize to its Asian neighbors in the manner that the victim countries request, and Japan should further endeavor to provide proper compensation to the individual victims.

On the other hand, the mainstream, conservative prism of Japan regarding its own history is not dyadic between itself and its Asian neighbors. Rather, Japan understands its wartime past through the prism of its relationship with the West, especially the US. This prism focuses on how Japan struggled to secure itself against the encroaching power of Western imperialism, and to bring equality between itself and the Western imperial powers (Tamamoto 2003). Although Japan caused its Asian neighbors some pain, Japan behaved no worse than any other colonial power. The theme of the late

nineteenth century was raw imperialism, and thus, at that time Japan had no option but to catch up with and become the West by rapid modernization in the interest of national survival (Pyle 2007). Subsequently, modernized Japan tried to protect the mainland, to “liberate” Asia against Western imperialism, and to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, not for Japan alone, but for all of Asia (Kim 2014). In doing so, Japan was forced to enter WWII as a matter of self-defense. In spite of Japan’s acknowledged remorse for its Asian neighbors, Japan itself feels wronged, as no Western powers have properly addressed their dark imperial wrongdoings to former non-Western colonies. Given the repeated apologies of Japan to its Asian neighbors, because Japan lost WWII relative to the nations of the West, the psychological effect of Japan’s war guilt is nothing but justice for the Western victors. After WWII, “many Japanese thought that they were defeated by US military forces, not by Asian peoples. To put it another way, even though Japan’s decision to fight against the US had been a catastrophic mistake, our [Japan’s] expansion toward Asia had been reasonable in itself” (Yoshihumi 1999). From the Japanese perspective, therefore, WWII must be seen within the framework of the evolving conflict between Japan and the West for regional hegemony over the Asia-Pacific region (Stanzel 2001). In the space of this historical framework, there is not much room to dwell on Asian suffering caused by Japan. Indeed, Asia was never an equal to Japan in world history. Simply put, Asia is not a subject, but rather is an extra of Japanese history vis-à-vis the West.

Moreover, the above historical prism of Japan and the West selectively focuses on the final year and a half of WWII, which was dominated by the US airborne destruction of 66 Japanese cities and, most of all, the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After Japan’s defeat, a national discourse emerged, depicting the Japanese as

victims. This discourse dominated the mindset of the people (Tamamoto 2006). Many Japanese people still believe that the US has yet to address its own state-sanctioned crimes against humanity. “Memory based on victimhood then pardoned the Japanese of their guilt, fostered an already ubiquitous sense of self-pity, and impeded the search for historical truth”.<sup>22)</sup> In addition, the discourse of victimhood was the key to building a pacifist consensus, which categorically denounced all wars. In Japan, this notion that all wars are bad and that everyone suffers from their consequences tends to focus national attention toward the suffering of Japan, and away from the memories of the suffering of its Asian neighbors under Japanese imperialism (Dower 1999). This is a site where Asia is forgotten by way of remembering Japan vis-à-vis the US during Japan’s wartime period. After all, Japan’s “pacifism happens to be a high-minded way to dull the pain of historical guilt. Or, conversely, if one wallows in it, pacifism turns national guilt into a virtue, almost a mark of superiority, when compared to the complacency of other nations” (Buruma 2002). After all, Japan is morally superior to the West who has yet to fully repent for its past imperial aggression.

It seems clear that the historical prism of Japan’s victimhood is difficult to reconcile with the historical prisms of South Korea and China wherein Japan is the perpetrator. To advance political reconciliation, it is necessary to form a shared regional identity among actors. Currently, however, the state identity of each Northeast Asian country depends on the strikingly different (in not incompatible) memories of Japan and South Korea and China. Historically-rooted suspicion and resentment between Japan and South Korea and China continue to inform the forces of political reconciliation. Under these circumstances, political reconciliation remains a pipe dream, often

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22) Shin, Gi-wook (2014), Op. cit.

regressing instead of progressing, even though the disgruntled countries have managed economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation. This is the Asian paradox today, which cannot be fully addressed by realist arguments of relative military capabilities, liberalist arguments of institutions and economic interdependence, or constructivist arguments of linear socialization. Even though mainstream IR theories have a great deal to say about international relations in Northeast Asia, these theories about the region are useful only when they are sufficiently sensitive to critical contextual factors. It is in this context that we need to heed the divergence in historical perceptions among Northeast Asian states as one of the critical obstacles to political reconciliation, despite the emergence of complex economic and cultural interdependence.

## V. Conclusion

Recently the Asian paradox has become more salient in Northeast Asia, which suggests that political reconciliation in the region is not just stagnant, but regressive. Once-regular trilateral cooperation among Japan, South Korea and China has been not so fruitful, and public opinions within each of the three countries toward their neighbors are degenerative. Together with the territorial disputes in Northeast Asia, the issues of apology and compensation regarding Japan's wartime atrocities have come to dominate and worsen South Korea-Japan and China-Japan relations. It is argued that strikingly different historical prisms between South Korea and China and Japan are central to explaining the current regression of political reconciliation in Northeast Asia. Interpreting history is a process that leaves an imprint on state identity, thus serving as the basis of a state's interests on an ongoing

basis. History also informs a state's threat perception in telling its people about who they are by way of stressing who they are not and what they must fear. History, which is often ignored in traditional security studies, is in fact a security matter, and thus, understanding one's historical prism is necessary for gaining a better picture of high politics among international actors.

There is a perceptual gulf between South Korea and China on one hand, and Japan on the other, regarding how to understand Japan's wartime past during the early twentieth century. South Korea and China understand Japan's wartime past through the prism of South Korea and China as victims, with Japan as the perpetrator. This is the norm in South Korea and China. For Japan, there are multiple ways of understanding its wartime past, but the current historical prism of the right wing, which perceives its history in the strategic context of Japan vis-à-vis the West, is distinctive. In this prism, there is not much space to dwell on the Asian suffering caused by the past deeds of Japan. Rather, the prism sees Japan as a victim of WWII, who suffered greatly from US atomic bombings on its soil. This is a site where Asia is forgotten by way of remembering Japan primarily vis-à-vis the US during Japan's period of war. It seems clear that the historical prism of Japan's victimhood is difficult to reconcile with the historical prisms of South Korea and China, wherein Japan is the perpetrator of state-sanctioned crimes against humanity. Under these circumstances, reconciliation, which is "the point of encounter where concerns about the past and the future can meet" (Lederach 1997), remains a pipe dream in Northeast Asia. Note that these incompatible historical prisms do not block all regional cooperation per se, but rather they significantly impede political reconciliation, which is essential for stability and conflict prevention. We thus witness the Asia paradox in Northeast Asia today. As discussed, this paradox clearly defies

mainstream IR theories that have originated in the West. Thus, in theory application, context-sensitivity is crucial in order to accurately examine the complex, nuanced international relations of Northeast Asian today.

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## 다른 역사적 프리즘과 동북아에서 퇴보하는 정치적 화해

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이 논문의 경험적 목적은 역내 증진하는 복잡한 상호 의존성에도 불구하고 동북아 주요 국가들(한국, 중국, 일본)의 정치적 화해를 가로막는 중요 장애물을 분석적으로 고찰하는 것에 있다. 이를 위해 이 논문은 최근 동북아의 정치적 화해의 변화 추세를 두 가지 수준 - 정부 간 수준과 시민사회 수준 - 을 기준으로 살펴보고, 한중일 간 해결되지 않고 있는 문제들 중에 크게 두 가지 문제 - 일본에 대한 한국과 중국의 지속적인 사과 요구, 역사 해석에서 비롯되는 역사 교과서 서술 논쟁 - 를 중점적으로 분석한다. 이러한 분석을 통해서, 이 논문은 역내 국가들 간의 상이한 혹은 상충적인 역사적 프리즘(관점)이 최근 동북아에서 정치적 화해의 퇴보를 설명하는 데 있어서 핵심적인 요소라는 것을 주장한다. 또한, 역내 국가들의 상이한 역사적 프리즘(관점)에 대한 민감성이 고려되지 않는 주류 국제관계(현실주의, 자유주의 및 재래식 구성주의) 이론은 오늘날 복잡 다단한 동북아 국제관계를 부분적으로만 설명하고 있음을 지적한다. 고로, 정치적 화해 증진 방안의 고려와 좀 더 포괄적인 동북아 국제관계의 이론적 이해를 위해서는 역내 국가들의 상이한 역사적 프리즘(관점)의 맥락적 민감성이 요구된다.

▪ Key words: 국제관계 이론, 화해, 역사, 아시아 패러독스, 동북아시아