



Historical Dialogue & Reconciliation in East Asia

UNDERSTANDINGS of history have profound implications for international relations in East Asia. "Memories" of historical events are used by governments as instruments of diplomacy as well as the focus of national identity. In September of this year, the *Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA* in cooperation with the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University, presented the Historical Dialogue and Reconciliation in East Asia Series.

This seminar grew out of a five year project undertaken by Japanese and overseas Chinese historians supported by the Tokyo-based Sasakawa Peace Foundation that produced a book of essays with the tentative English title, *Contentious Issues in Modern Sino-Japanese Relations: Toward a History Beyond Borders*. This book has been published in Chinese (PRC) and Japanese in 2006. An English translation is now underway.

Speakers at this seminar were **Kawashima Shin** and **Lim Jie-hyun**. **Kawashima Shin** is an Associate Profes-

sor at the University of Tokyo, where he teaches the history of East Asian international relations. He was previously a special researcher at the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and an Assistant Professor at Hokkaido University. He graduated from Tokyo Foreign Language University and received his PhD from the University of Tokyo. He is the author of several books in Japanese on East Asian international relations. His first book, *The Formation of Modern Chinese Diplomacy* (in Japanese), was awarded the Suntory prize in 2004.

Lim Jie-hyun is a Professor at Hanyang University in South Korea, where he specializes in Polish history and comparative studies of nationalisms. He is a leading figure in South Korea in the development of transnational history. He is also the director of the Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture. He received his PhD in Western Intellectual History from Sogang University and is the author of several books in Korean on nationalism and dictatorship.

The following is the continuation of papers presented by Kawashima Shin

and Lim Jie-hyun in September. The papers presented here discuss the backgrounds of current disputes over history as well as ongoing efforts at dialogue and transnational historical cooperation.

Lim Jie-hyun

My topic is not about political problems, historical commissions, history books, education systems, etc. Rather, about historical culture in a very basic sense, upon which these historical books and education systems and policies and even political power have been invented.

If the former group of "the facts" belongs to the domain of hard power, perhaps historical culture may belong to soft power, especially with its hegemony backed by the civil society level. It is very often heard that the change of political regime is very important for historical reconciliation in East Asia. Yes, if this is true, but any political regime in East Asia should take into consideration the strong existence of nationalism on the civil society level. So even though these political regimes want to escape

Taro Aso, Japan's prime minister, center, makes a speech at the Kyushu National Museum, Japan. (left) Lee Myung Bak, South Korea's president, is welcomed by kindergartners at the Kyushu National Museum (below).

nationalistic, antagonistic stalemates between regimes, they have to pay attention to the very strong, hegemonic existence of nationalism on the civil society level. So even very strong political power cannot be free from this sort of nationalism as soft power.

Prevalence of Victimhood Nationalism

I would like to say something about nationalism as soft power, especially regarding the term "victimhood." Actually, victimhood is not confined to some small and weak countries, countries colonized and victimized during the war. Fortunately or unfortunately, in 2003 I was staying here and witnessed how American society responded to Bush's call for the second Iraq war. I could see that visibly, quite predictably, and sometimes quite emotionally and energetically, the American audience respond-

ed to the call from the political power towards the second Iraq war. I think that behind the response of the American audience toward the second Iraq War lies a sort of victim. The American nation—we are the victims of a terrorist attack; perhaps the worst victims of a terrorist attack. So in the wake of September 11, I think that American society could respond to Bush's call for a second Iraq War quite positively, and almost unanimously in the Congress.

So I think victimhood is quite a prevalent phenomenon, confined not only to weak, colonized, or victimized nations, but also some victimizing nations and also colonizing nations. So that is why victimhood is quite widely found not only in Korea and China in the East Asian case, but also in Japan. And in the European case, victimhood also can be found now in Germany, especially the post-1999 regimes.

The Jedwabne Massacre

I will turn back to this phenomenon in a more specific way. Actually, my interest in victimhood came from my encounters with Polish history and espe-

cially the hot debate on the massacre in Jedwabne. The Jedwabne massacre is a tragedy or genocide committed by Poles in July 1941 under the German occupation. But until 1999, many Poles believed that that tragedy, the massacre of Jews in the small town of Jedwabne, was perpetrated by Germans. But a Jewish historian who came from Poland, Jan Gross, excavated the truth about the massacre in Jedwabne, and he revealed that it was done not by Germans but by Poles.

It brought the whole of Polish society into a state of shock—"we were taught that the Poles never harmed their neighbors. We are a very peaceful nation. We have always been invaded by Germans, Russians, and even Habsburg Austrians." As historical victims who are hereditary victims, Poles could enjoy a privileged position and a morally very comfortable position since they always regarded themselves as victims. But suddenly, they found out their compatriots were perpetrators, especially in this terrible massacre of Jews in Jedwabne. Polish neighbors killed or massacred their Jewish neighbors on a certain day. So it was really quite a shock in regard to historical culture among the Polish masses.

And then there followed lots of hot debates about the massacre in Jedwabne: in Polish historiography, Jewish historiography, controversies between Poles and Jews, controversies between some leftist Polish historians, rightist Polish historians, ultra-rightist historians, the Kaczyński brothers, and so on.

So these messy controversies followed this—the revelation of this massacre in Poland. But what is most interesting to me regarding these controversies was that the Ładański brothers were perpetrators in Jedwabne in 1941, and they survived the war. Immediately after the war, they were convicted for the murder of Jews in Jedwabne, but they were released from prison.

So after the revelation of the massacre in Jedwabne, a Polish journalist and a German journalist tried to have an interview with these living, convicted Ładański brothers. And in this interview, the most interesting thing is that the Ładański brothers regarded themselves as victims. "Like the whole Polish nation, we suffered...we suffered under the Germans, we suffered under the Soviet occupation, we suffered under the People's Republic of Poland..."

So in this interview, we find a very magical metamorphosis of individual victimizers into the collective victim. So they could hide behind the memory wall of collective victimhood in terms of the nation. So that is why I found that col-



lective victimhood or some hereditary victimhood, victim nationalism, is quite dangerous. And actually, it hinders historical reconciliation, for example, in this case, between Jews and Poles and between Israel and the Polish state now.

Collective Guilt and Innocence

Based on this assumption, let me point out several points that are quite crucial to understanding victimhood nationalism and historical reconciliation. First, the dichotomy of collective guilt and collective innocence. Hannah Arendt in the early 1960's made a brilliant analysis of collective victimhood in her book, the very controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. I think that book has already survived the test of time. I think it is still one of the most crucial books in understanding collective guilt and collective innocence and how this feeling of collective guilt contributes to the making of a certain sort of historical consciousness, sentiments, and so on.

In speaking of the Japanese to my students, usually, we tend to believe that you should be sorry that you belong to the Japanese nation that victimized, colonized, perpetrated atrocities against your Asian neighbors during World War II. But usually, their friends are Japanese who were born after the 1980's. So I used to ask my students, "Do you think that you are responsible for the atrocities that the Korean army perpetrated in the Vietnam War in the late 1960's before you were born?" And they used to say, "It is impossible that we can be responsible for acts that were done even before we were born." But why do you say to your Japanese friends, "You should take responsibility for what the Japanese nation did during World War II and during colonial rule?" So it is a bit strange. But on the other hand, every young Korean cannot escape from a sort of feeling that we feel sorry for the Vietnamese. Those atrocities and brutalities were not done by myself, but they were done by the generation of my fathers, my uncles, so we feel sorry anyway.

We should divide historical responsibility into two levels. One level is that people can be responsible only for what they have done. We cannot be responsible for what we did not do. But on the other hand, today's young people, for example, the young generation who were born after the 1980s, are responsible for the memory of the past, how the society remembers the past and what our ancestors did to our neighbors. So they are not responsible for what has been done, but all of us are responsible for the contemporary memory of the past, and we

are responsible for how our contemporary societies are remembering the past, both negative and positive and so on. So we should approach the younger generation in this way by stressing that their responsibility, our common responsibility, is for society's memories of the past, which is quite unpleasant. But, anyway, we should remember that.

That is one point. We should avoid the politics of, "you should be sorry." You should be responsible just because you belong to this nation, or we are innocent just because we belong to the Korean nation regardless of what I have actually done. That actually reinforces the feeling of national belonging. And so in that way collective guilt and collective innocence are very crucial emotional tools or conceptual tools to lead people into a very strong feeling of national belonging and thus intensifies and reinforces nationalism.

Sacralization and Uniqueness

The second point is the sacralization of memories. For example, very often we hear this common response from ordinary people, "You foreigners can never ever understand our own tragic history. Only we who suffered from this tragic history can understand it, so we have the exclusive right to understand and to explain this. You foreigners, you will never experience such a tragic history. You can never ever understand our own history, so you have no right to tackle our understanding of history." Perhaps between individuals, it might be partly true. Everyone has his own secrets, and they cannot be shared even by—we have some experiences that cannot be shared even by wives or husbands. So every individual has some secrecy, but if this sacralization of memory develops into a group level or a national level, it has a different connotation. It actually precludes any possibility to share understandings of the past with the others.

Sacralization of politics also sometimes exists, and usually it works out as a bulwark against others' understanding of our past and as such, eventually blocks a mutual understanding of the past.

So I'm afraid that the discourse of uniqueness is dominant, especially in the discourse on the Holocaust. Of course we should recognize that every historical event is a singularity. Every historical event or every historical accident or every history has its own singular characteristics that cannot be denominated into general history or common history with neighbors. But even though we recognize this singularity, it should not be made equal to uniqueness. It is a differ-



ent story.

Transnationality

The third point I would like to emphasize is transnationality. Victims cannot be imaginable without imagining victimizers. So if one would like to approach victimhood in Korea, he or she should approach Japan as the victimizers. For example, if one approaches victimhood consciousness in Poland, he should know the Polish-Jewish relationships before the Second World War and the Polish-German relationships under the German occupation and even Polish-Russian relationships. Only with an understanding of the transnational circumstances evolving around victimhood, can we really understand what this victimhood nationalism is. So in a sense, a transnational historical approach is inevitable and indispensable, and the national historic paradigm would not work out. So it is quite an irony that victimhood nationalism can be understood not in the national historic paradigm but only in the paradigm of transnational history.

Victimizers as Victims

The fourth point is that victimhood nationalism also can be found among victimizers in Japan and Germany. Japan as Professor Bu Ping already pointed out was the first nation bombed by an atomic bomb, and that contributed much to the making of Japanese victimhood. A



Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, left, delivers a speech during a trilateral summit meeting in Dazaifu, southern Japan.

land, and Grass also alluded to the fact that there were not only civilians onboard but also Germans in uniform. So Günter Grass, on the one hand, emphasized the innocent deaths of more than 8,000 Germans, but on the other hand, never forgot to allude to several historical circumstances in which these German civilians actually were located. So over-contextualization and decontextualization can also be found in the various discourses regarding victimhood nationalism.

Kawashima Shin

I have joined several joint research projects between China and Japan, as well as between Japan and Taiwan. And I am a member of the government-level joint study between China and Japan. The government-level joint study has about 20 members on each side, and the members are divided into two groups, premodern and modern, and the modern group is also divided into two parts, modern and contemporary history. So there are three parts of this joint study: premodern, modern, and contemporary.

Which group discussion is most sensitive? Most of us would think modern history. The modern history group has to discuss war and the Japanese invasion of China. But actually, our group, the modern group, discussed matters in a more academic and cool way than other groups. Why? Because in the past 10 years or more, historians who do research on modern history in East Asia have had so many chances, so many opportunities to talk about these problems. So we know where the minefield is, how to avoid it, and whether to touch the minefield or not. And we know the adequate terminology to prevent the coalition from burning out. I do not know if this is a good result of the joint study or not, but I think it is a very good result to prevent the program from burning out.

International and Domestic Effects

I will start my presentation about the history problems in East Asia. As other presenters pointed out, there are so many history problems in East Asia, primarily involving Japan, but aside from Japan, there are history problems between China and South Korea (or the two Koreas), and China and Taiwan. These history problems have affected the development of normal exchanges on political, economic, and social issues.

We also have to pay attention to the other problem, the history problem in the

the trauma of the Pacific War led to an emphasis on the confrontation between America and Japan instead of emphasizing the confrontations between Chinese and Japanese and between Japanese and Koreans. It worked out to a belief that we Japanese are the victimized nation and were the victims.

There was also the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers' perception of the Japanese people. They defined nearly all of the Japanese people as simply victims of their military leaders. But this perception of ordinary people as just passive victims actually deprives the Japanese people of agency. Where has their historical agency gone? Certainly, this sort of perception of ordinary people as passive victims is an obstacle to understanding how deeply ordinary people appropriated certain circumstances on their own and how they actively responded to the political power and the given circumstances and so on.

Contextualization

Finally, I would like address the question of over-contextualization and decontextualization. Usually, victims tend to over-contextualize historical circumstances. For example, there was a controversy about *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, a novella written by a Japanese expellee who had to flee from North Korea to Japan after Japan's defeat in the Second World War. Many Koreans were

upset by the novella's depiction of the ordeal of Japanese civilians who had to flee from the occupied land. It depicts how the Koreans threatened them on their way back to Japan, and Koreans were shocked, saying, "Oh, we are the victims. We never ever victimized the Japanese—we were victims of Japanese colonialism," and so forth. So in that case, the Koreans tended to over-contextualize their historical situation.

On the other hand, the author, Yoko Kawashima Watkins, tends to decontextualize. She just emphasized how she and her mom and her sister suffered from the Koreans' hostile attitudes towards the Japanese on their way back to Japan. She is totally ignorant of the historical circumstances, why her family came to leave North Korea and why Koreans had such hostile attitudes towards Japanese. Those sort of facts are totally forgotten. So we can find a stark contrast of over-contextualization and decontextualization between the Korean audience's perception of the novella and Yoko Kawashima Watkins' own description of her past.

It is a very stark contrast with Günter Grass' *Im Krebsgang*, which depicts very vividly how 8,000 Germans were killed by a Soviet submarine torpedo attack, but he never forgot to describe the fact that the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was a ship that was used by the Nazis' propaganda project of Strength Through Joy, and Gustloff himself was a Nazi collaborator in Switzer-

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domestic field. The history problem is easily related to nationalistic discourses and emotional social movements in domestic politics. So such trends easily affected domestic politics and economic activities. So we have to face dual problems on history, international and domestic.

Different National Memories

I would like to explain briefly how different the recognition of history among East Asian countries is. I will cite two simple examples. The first case is about the public memory toward World War II. Most Japanese people know the facts of the invasion of other Asian countries and China by Japanese troops and Japanese civilians. But as mentioned by Professor Lim, most Japanese recognize themselves as victims of the war, partly because Japan is the only atomic bombed country in the world, and also because the Japanese recognize that Japan was defeated by the U.S., not by China. For Japanese people, 1945 is the watershed point in their memory.

On the other hand, most Chinese people also recognize themselves as victims of the war. And Chinese people are proud of the great victory over Japan and also recognized that the victims, the Chinese, were supported by the USSR. They emphasize the USSR's support more than U.S. support. Also, in their memory, 1945 is not the watershed point.

The second case is about the symbols of the end of the war—victory in World War II. Japan surrendered diplomatically on August 14, 1945, and Hirohito announced the surrender to the Allies by radio on August 15, 1945. Japan surrendered formally on September 2, 1945. How about the anniversaries or symbolic days in each country? In Japan, most Japanese people recognize the end of the war as August 15, right? It was recognized as a turning point in the early post-war days, and still is today. Chinese VJ day is September 3rd. Most Chinese forget about it, actually. The U.S. VJ day is September 2nd, right? And the Taiwanese liberation day is October 25. There are various images, various anniversaries, various symbols in East Asia.

Unification of History?

So, is it necessary to unify such varied histories in East Asia, is it possible to share so-called "objective facts" among East Asian countries? The answer is "no" or "it's difficult," at the very least. We have to imagine history not as only one history, but as a history or histories that are interpreted in various and diverse ways. So we need to adopt the attitude or con-

cept of "agreeing to disagree" with each other at first.

History of History Problems

When we consider the history problems in East Asia, we must pay attention to the precondition and background of history problems in East Asia, especially about the history of the history problems.

Actually, the first history problem in East Asia happened in the 1910's. At that time, the Japanese government complained to the Chinese government that the textbook in China was anti-Japanese, so the Japanese government forced the Chinese government to revise the contents of its textbook. Afterwards, a series of textbook problems and the historical problem of the war itself happened until 1945. Most of us imagine that textbook problems really started in the 1980s, but actually we have a long, long history of history problems. So, it is difficult and very challenging for us, for East Asian peoples, to solve, to cope with these history problems.

Secondly, when we analyze the contents of the textbooks 100 years ago, we find that each countries' so-called "modernity" connoted a negative image of the other. Japan imagined a negative image of the Chinese and Chinese textbooks also had a negative image of Japan, but both countries admired Western society. So the historical problem itself is a problem of modernity in East Asia.

Third, is a Chinese textbook published in 1909 under the Qing Dynasty. When we see its chapters on historical problems, it is easy for us to see that the contents of the chapters are similar to the textbooks edited by the KMT and CCP later on. The content starts from the Opium War, Taiping Rebellion, Second Opium War and so on, it's very interesting. The so-called framework of invasion and resistance emerged in 1909, and this is used in the histories written by the KMT and CCP. So this history problem has a very profound and long history.

The history problem is an old and new problem in East Asia. So we must pay attention to the formation of this problem and also learn from our predecessors' wisdom in coping with these history problems.

Chiang Kai-shek advocated the concept of "answering an injury with a favor" to strengthen generosity toward Japan and to prevent history problems from burning out good relations. Zhou Enlai, he strengthened the so-called friendship with Japan, also in order to control the history problems or prevent history problems from burning out the relation-

ship. But the efficacy of such a slogan creased in the 1980's and 1990's.

Contexts of History Problems

What is the history problem in Asia in the world's eyes, or, how can we compare it with other cases in the Middle East, Europe, and so on? Actually, East Asian history problem has so many contexts. For example, for Japanese so-called history problem has a meaning. The first is a kind of problem of peacemaking after the war. After the end of World War II, how did Japan deal with the so-called history problem to build a new trust with other Asian countries? Actually, Japan also shared the slogan of Chiang Kai-shek and Zhou Enlai in order to control or avoid the history problem from burning out good relations. Japan began to fail to control this problem from the 1980's onward.

The other aspect is a kind of de-idealization problem and decolonization. In 1945, Japan suddenly abandoned colonies, and Japan did not experience the process of decolonization. So Japan did not pay attention to history problems or reconciliation or other endeavor to build a new trust with Korea and Taiwan. We can also find that for Japan history problem has a dual aspect, the memory of the war and memory of decolonization. So East Asian history problem have many contexts.

Varieties of Historical Dialogue

In the past 10 years or more, many kinds of studies in East Asia have been advanced. On the government level, another presenter mentioned, talks were held in order to prevent history problems from burning out interstate relations. Japanese government organizes joint research committees with Korea and Taiwan at the half-governmental level. And on the non-governmental level, historians and teachers also have organized an uncountable number of studies between Japan and China, Korea and other countries. At the civil society level, NPOs, lawyers, journalists, and former soldiers have advanced so many exchanges or co-studies.

When we look at the massive number and variety of joint studies, we find various purposes. Some groups have high expectations. They proceed with the goal of unifying the textbooks. They also advocate for and try to create the basis of a community of East Asia, a so-called East Asia community. So that's the high expectation level.

I think the average approach to joint research intends to reduce the tension of history problems in order to prevent it from affecting other exchanges. T

From left to right: Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso, and South Korean President Lee Myung-bak



groups are eager to reduce or narrow the gaps between national histories, sometimes through shared materials.

The most minimal level is just conversation, just dialogue: have lunch, dinner, drink *sake*, finish. Through such joint studies, we had many opportunities for dialogue.

Did we come to any fruitful result? Yes, we had positive results. We understand how different the perspectives are, and that can reduce the gaps a little bit. We also experienced the following process: conversation, understanding and respect. We also came to understand the merits and demerits of different methodologies, and also to understand the importance of the "agreeing to disagree" attitude. We also tried many ways of historical writing: unification, parallel writing, making comments to each to other, and so on.

Also, we discovered the importance of materials. Needless to say, in history, materials can be interpreted in various ways, but shared materials can reduce the gap to some extent. And materials can be a kind of trigger for discussion. In the 1930's, Wang Yunsheng was a very famous journalist of the newspaper *Da Gong Bao* in China. His book was also respected in Japan because it was based on very interesting and good material. But we have to pay attention to the sensitivity of materials in Taiwan and Korea's modern history—the governmental archives, official archives for Taiwan and Korea in modern history, most of the documents were written in the ruler's language, Japanese. So if the Japanese side in a dialogue emphasizes the importance of materials, this attitude

can cause problems.

Problems

Aside from the positive results, there are many negative results. Actually, we are facing them today. There are so many difficulties in advancing joint research between China and Japan. We do not have enough time to introduce all of the problems here, so I will cite two examples.

The first is about historiography itself. When did the Japanese invasion start? It is too difficult for us to solve—1937, 1931, with the 21 Demands, with the Sino-Japanese War in 1895? With the building of the Meiji government, did Japan have a continuous policy toward China? The Chinese side emphasizes the continuity of Japanese invasion policy, a solid policy. Did Japan and China have an alternative way in the 1930's to avoid collision and war?

There are many problems. One problem is a bigger problem for us: How to transmit the results to society? Is the result just the self-satisfaction of historians without an ability to change public opinion on history matters? We have only two or three ways to influence the public: to publish books, through talks, and through education. Actually, we have several ways, but we have no idea how to transmit the results to society. It is a big problem, especially in the governmental level joint study, because the government has to explain the results to the public.

Extending Joint Studies

Finally, I will talk about the task of extending co-studies in East Asia. There are things we must continue to do, dialogue, domestic and international, and increas-

ing the kinds of materials for common use in East Asia, doing dialogues on methodology and so on, and making more chances for exchanges among the younger generation. I think one more challenge for us is to get specialists on human security and especially peace building to enter this field. There are specialists on human security problems who deal with history in other countries; but we do not have many such scholars in Japan, specialists on human rights or human security problems, who are interested in this history problem.

We also face challenges in historiography. I think the construction of a common history is difficult for us to realize at the moment, so for now we need to reconsider the process of formation and the backgrounds of national histories, make a list of differences, and so on. And we should keep working on joint studies to prevent history problems from affecting other exchange areas.

We must narrow the gap between national histories, although on the other hand, it is better for us to find other ways to describe history that goes beyond so-called national history. Trying to find and arrange the diversities within national histories—local history or gender history and so on, perhaps something we can discuss is the history of the East China Sea. If possible, we can challenge the descriptions of common history in East Asia, because each East Asian country strengthens the diversity within national histories.

There are many common histories among East Asian countries. For example, in the 19th century, the Western trade system expanded to East Asia and public health systems were also introduced in East Asia, media histories about radio or radio stars, sewing machines peddled in the cities and rural areas, and so on. We can write common histories, and afterwards, we can write different histories. It is a challenge, but I think we can succeed.

It is important for us to cooperate with third parties, with the U.S. or EU and other regions, perhaps the Middle East. If we have good opportunities to cooperate with other regions, we can find new historiographies, for example, East Asian history in global history. We can also compare our projects on dialogue and reconciliation with those of other regions—the Middle East or the Balkan peninsula and others.