Is Reconciliation between Japan and South Korea Reachable?
Past Efforts, Missed Opportunities, and Future Steps

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

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NBC reportedly fired one of its Olympic analysts who praised Japan's role in South Korea's economic development, and disregarding Tokyo's rule with an iron fist from 1940 to 1945, which is still a sensitive subject to many in Seoul.

MarketWatch, citing The Korea Times, reported that an NBC official said it is no longer possible for Joshua Cooper Ramo to work with the network.

Ramo made the remark during NBC's prime-time telecast of Friday's opening ceremony in pointing out the presence of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.
DOKDO/TAKESHIMA

“Are you familiar with Takeshima? In the 17th century, the Tokugawa shogunate established sovereignty by giving [Japanese fishermen] permission to catch sea lions. This normally uninhabited rock formation was according to our information never treated as part of Korea.”
- Tokyo National Museum of Territory and Sovereignty

“Dokdo was the first Korean territory to be seized in the process of Japan’s occupation of the Korean Peninsula. It is our territory. Japan denying this is no different to (Japan) refusing to admit to the wrongs of imperialistic invasion.”
- President Moon Jae-in in his March 1 Address, 2018
Past Efforts and Modes of Reconciliation

► Apology
  ▪ Since 1984, Japanese heads of state or government have issued a number of direct apologies to China and Korea
  ▪ **Kono Statement** of 1993, acknowledging and apologizing for the forceful recruitment of the comfort women; **Murayama Statement** of 1995, acknowledging and apologizing for the damage and suffering caused by Japan to its Asian neighbors; **Kim-Obuchi Joint Declaration** of 1998, apologizing for the unbearable damage and pain inflicted on Korean people during the colonial rule; **Kan Statement** of 2010, apologizing for Japan's colonial rule of Korea

► Joint History Writing
  ▪ Establishment of the Japan-ROK Joint History Research Committee in 2001, with a goal of narrowing the gap in views of history
  ▪ A similar project launched between Japan and China in 2006
Past Efforts and Modes of Reconciliation

► Litigation
  ▪ Numerous instances of litigation have been filed against the Japanese government and Japanese firms (both in China/Japan/Korea and in the U.S.) by victims of sex slavery and forced labor during the colonial periods

► Regional Exchanges and Civil Activism
  ▪ Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat
  ▪ Track 1.5 or 2 meetings on historical issues
  ▪ Japan-Korea Civil Society Coalitions
Limitations

- Confusing/Conflicting Messages from Japan
  - Ambiguous wording and counterproductive statements that follow apologies
  - Continued skepticism about the sincerity of its apologies, which have not been backed up by action (98% of Koreans and 78% of Chinese believe that Japan has not sufficiently/sincerely apologized)

- Japan’s Apology Fatigue
  - 67% of Japanese believe that Japan has sufficiently apologized for its wartime crimes

- Failure to Narrow the Gap between Historical Memories of Involved Countries
  - The efforts to produce a joint history have failed because they have not been able to bridge differences in interpretations of the past

- Legal Interpretations of the San Francisco Peace Treaty

- Multiplicity of Historical and Territorial Disputes
Politics

► Abe’s Attempts to Revisit the Kono Statement
► Moon’s Intent to Re-negotiate the 2015 Comfort Women Deal

Media

► Nationalist
► Lack of Diversity
Education

- Explicit aim of forming a sense of national identity
  - The promotion of national pride and national identity as the primary function of history education

- Government-censored textbooks
  - Differences in the focus of Historical Memory
• Kim and Obuchi expressed their shared determination to build a new partnership toward the 21st century

• Obuchi expressed keen remorse and apologized for the historical fact that Japan, through its past colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula, imposed great damage and pain on the South Korean people. Appreciating the prime minister’s apology, Kim stressed the importance of mutual efforts to build future-oriented relations by overcoming their unfortunate shared history.

DJ’s Assessment, 7 years later
### Differences in the Focus of Historical Memory

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Divergent Memories: Historical Narratives in Asia

- China: Fashioning a Patriotic Narrative
- Korea: Confronting Collaboration
- Japan: Multiple Memories of War
- U.S.: “Uncomfortable War” in the Pacific
U.S. Role

- U.S. is not an outsider to the situation and needs to take some responsibility—Tokyo Tribunal and San Francisco Treaty
- U.S. as a facilitator
What about Korea and China?

A larger process of historical reconciliation in Northeast Asia was expected but never followed.

These visits should not have been a means to reconcile historical issues between the US and Japan and to bolster the US-Japan alliance.

The Japanese prime minister could have followed suit with similar gestures toward its Asian neighbors, such as a visit to Nanjing or to comfort women residence in Korea.
Future Steps

- Focus on Common, Future-Oriented Goals
  - Rise of China
  - North Korean Threat
  - Demographic Crisis
  - Cooperation in the Economic Sector