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To Apologize and To Forgive: Lessons for Asia from Europe's Struggle with History

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Introduction

As the recent flare up of tensions between Korea and Japan over the Comfort Women, Dokdo (called Takeshima by Japan) and other historical issues demonstrates once again, the past remains a dangerous and disruptive topic in East Asian politics.¹ Despite decades of efforts, Korea and Japan seem to find it impossible to arrive at a mutually agreeable understanding of their history and its implications, even though they have powerful geo-strategic and geo-economic incentives to do so. In light of this dismal record, one might easily conclude that the two nations will never be able to achieve reconciliation.² The European experience, however, suggests that this need not be a foregone conclusion, even though it also suggests that the barriers to doing so remain formidable.

Europe has often been a point of reference for Asian debates over history. There are two starkly opposed positions on the issue. Many—especially Japanese conservatives—would object to using Europe as a reference point for Asia. Others hold up the European experience—and especially Germany's efforts to come to apologize and atone for the Nazi era—as a model that Asian countries should emulate. Both positions are mistaken.

¹ For more on the territorial dispute between Korea and Japan, see Alexis Dudden, "Korea-Japan Standoff: Why Americans Should Care," *The Huffington Post*, 2012, accessed September 16, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alexis-dudden/koreajapan-standoff-why-a_b_1885534.html?utm_hp_ref=world. See also Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea Returns Letter on Islets from Japanese Leader," *The New York Times*, 2012, accessed September 17, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/24/world/asia/south-korea-returns-letter-from-japanese-leader-or-tries-to.html>.

² For a pessimistic view along these lines by an influential and knowledgeable commentator on Japanese-Korean affairs, see Victor Cha, "Japan-ROK Relations: Antagonism over Alignment?" *PacNet Newsletter* no. 58, September 11, 2012, accessed September 18, 2012, <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-58-japan-rok-relations-antagonism-over-alignment>.

The advocates of apology typically argue that Japan's failure to fully face up to the moral consequences of the past is both a violation of international norms and a political failure. If Japan were to genuinely and sincerely apologize for its misdeeds and make amends to its victims, Asia, like Europe, would enjoy greater peace and stability. By extension, if other governments were only willing to confront the darker sides of their countries' histories—if for instance, Korea faced up to its history of collaboration and authoritarian rule, or the United States were to apologize to the Philippines for its history of colonial oppression and support for dictatorship—then the cause of peace and democracy in Asia would be greatly advanced.³

In contrast, apology skeptics argue that first, the historical and cultural backgrounds of the two regions are radically different so as to make a comparison meaningless, and second, that the stance that nations take on the past—whether they choose to apologize or not—is largely irrelevant to the politics of the present. Disputes over historical matters are either purely symbolic, or they mask more basic economic and security issues. In either case, the European experience is not pertinent to the Asian context, and to attempt to draw lessons from Europe for Asia is either useless, or even counterproductive.⁴ The problem with the arguments of both apology advocates and apology skeptics is that they are based on highly skewed readings of European history and the European experiences of wrestling with the past. The anti-apologists are quite correct that the historical contexts of the two regions are quite different and that calculations of interest play a critical role in shaping inter-state relations. At the same time, however, the European example demonstrates that the animosity created by the memory of past atrocities can have a very real and corrosive impact on inter-state relations, and that at least in some instances those animosities can not only be contained, but overcome. Moreover, many of the same forces that have made history an issue in Europe are apparent in the Asian context as well. Far more than the anti-apologists are willing to admit, there are lessons to be learned from Europe's efforts to wrestle with its past. They are just not the lessons that the advocates of apology would necessarily draw.

Perhaps the single most important lesson that can be drawn from Europe's long and difficult struggle with the past is that progress can be made in overcoming long-festered animosities, providing two sets of conditions are fulfilled. First, there must be a clear perception on both sides—both on the side of the perpetrators of historical injustices as well as on the side of their victims—that it is in their economic and political interests to pursue reconciliation. Apologies both have to be made, and accepted for reconciliation to work. Without such a foundation—often overlooked by reflexive apologists—stable reconciliation is impossible to achieve. Second, there must be a readiness and a capacity to exercise political leadership over an extended period of time to make reconciliation work. It is not enough for political leaders to meet on the functional equivalent of the White House lawn (or the garden of the Japanese kantei or the Korean Blue House) and shake hands and agree to adopt “forward looking policies” to reconcile two nations.

³ For a pro-apology view from a Japanese perspective, see Fujiwara Kiichi, *Ima Reksihimondai ni dō torikomū ka* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001). See also Shin Gi-Wook, Park Soon-Won, and Daqing Yang, eds., *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁴ See Okazaki Hisahiko, *Yasukuni Mondai to Chūgoku* (Tokyo: Kairyūka, 2006). For an argument made by an academic along these lines, see Jennifer Lind, *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

For a fundamental shift to occur states need to pursue a variety of policies reflecting a different view of the past, not just in terms of political rhetoric, but also on the level of education, commemoration as well as compensation for past injustices. Sadly, when looking at the state of Japanese-Korean relations today, it would appear that while the first set of conditions has been fulfilled, the second—the requirement of leadership and the ability to implement a program of sustained reconciliation—has not.

In the following, this essay briefly reviews the development of the history issue in the European context, drawing parallels with Asia along the way. In order to facilitate the analysis, the European experience is broken down into three periods: the emergence of the history issue between 1945 and the early 1960s, the intensification of the tensions over history during the second part of the Cold War, and the redefinition of the history issue in the post-Cold war period after 1991. In conclusion, this essay will draw some general lessons from the European experience, with special emphasis on the implications for Japan-Korea relations today.⁵

The Emergence of the History Issue – Imperfect Guilt and a “Certain Silence” after 1945

The Second World War had been an incredibly bloody period in European history. In all, an estimated 50 million or more people had been killed, including at least 15 million as a result of state policies that deliberately sought to exterminate large numbers of people. While Nazi Germany was responsible for the bulk of these atrocities, the Allied powers had been guilty of many horrors as well. This was particularly true of the Soviet Union, which sponsored the mass deportation of peoples resulting in millions of deaths and whose troops were allowed to brutalize the local population of virtually every country they moved into. But it was also true of the Western allies, who waged war with savage ferocity and who deliberately targeted civilian population as part of a campaign of aerial bombardment that killed over 200,000. Moreover, many of those killed by the Third Reich were not killed by the Germans alone. Millions of Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Frenchmen and others had participated willingly or unwillingly in Nazi atrocities. By the end of the war in 1945, virtually every nation in Europe had at least some blood on its hands.

In the aftermath of the war, efforts were made to obtain justice for these horrors. By far the most famous was the Allied prosecution of Nazi war criminals and the extraction of resources to pay war reparations. But the pursuit of historical justice was hardly limited to Germany. In France, former collaborators were humiliated, stripped of their civil liberties, and, in some cases, executed. The same was true of Austria as well. And in Yugoslavia, enemies of the new Communist regime were rounded up and taken on a death march in which thousands perished.⁶

⁵ This essay draws on the much more detailed analysis of these issues in Thomas U. Berger, *War, Guilt and World Politics after World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁶ For an overview of politics at the time, see István Deák, Jan T. Gross and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe after World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fugu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

In each instance where an effort was made to achieve some sort of reckoning, the campaign to seek justice for past wrongs soon ran into difficulty for two sets of reasons. First, while many of those tried and convicted were deserving of punishment, many others were not. Moreover, many who were deserving of punishment were allowed to go free, whether as a result of judicial oversight or for political reasons. As a result, there emerged widespread resentment for a program that was seen as deeply flawed and fundamentally unjust. Second, efforts to punish the wrong proved extremely costly, not only in financial terms, but also because of the political divisions and general sense of uncertainty that they created. In many instances, elite members of society—doctors, lawyers, business leaders and senior bureaucrats—had been implicated in the crimes of the Nazi era, who were precisely the kind of peoples whose skills and abilities were needed to help rebuild war-ravaged societies. As the pressures of the Cold War intensified, so too did the need to quickly restore national unity. By the early 1950s, at the latest, even those countries which initially had been enthusiastic about pursuing war criminals began to scale back and eventually abandon their campaigns to pursue justice.

The one partial exception to this pattern was the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), which offered an official apology for the crimes of the Third Reich and embarked on a large-scale program to compensate the victims of Nazi atrocities. Yet, even in Germany there were limits to how far the government was willing to pursue the cause of historical justice. After 1950, the purge of former Nazi officials was to a large measure reversed, and there was a distinct decrease in the readiness to pursue and prosecute former war criminals. German leaders like Chancellor Konrad Adenauer phrased their apologies in ways that diminished the responsibility of ordinary Germans and the German nation as a whole for the crimes of the Third Reich. Compensation was offered primarily to former victims living in Israel and in Western allied countries, but not in the Communist East, where the majority of former victims were to be found. In general, there was a strong tendency to avoid the topic of German war crimes inside of Germany itself, a tendency that was reflected in German textbooks and commemorative policies of the time.⁷ As the former German Federal President Herman Lübke put it, a certain silence (“*eine gewisse Stille*”) regarding the atrocities of the Nazi era had descended over Germany, much as it did over the rest of Europe. To the extent that Germany was an exception to the rule, it was so out of practical necessity. Germany had to adopt a penitent stance on history because of the powerful pressure that victim groups in Israel and in allied countries could bring to bear, and because the Federal Republic desperately needed to rehabilitate its image in order to win acceptance as part of the West.⁸

Much the same dynamic can be observed in Asia around the same time. Indeed, instead of being an outlier, post-1945 Japan’s unwillingness to confront the atrocities of the Japanese Empire is in fact quite close to the European norm. Likewise, the unwillingness of many Asian countries to deal with the history of collaboration while under Imperial rule is quite close to the European

⁷ On the politics of the purges and their reversal under the Adenauer Chancellorship, see Norbert Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past: the Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Golb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁸ Lübke, “Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Gegenwart,” in Martin Broszat, ed., *Deutschlands Weg in die Diktatur: Internationale Konferenz zur nationalsozialistischen Machtübernahme im Reichstagsgebäude zu Berlin* (Berlin, 1983), 334-335.

pattern. The main reason that Japan did not follow the West German example was because it was under less pressure to do so. There were no groups of influential victims in Asia comparable to the Jews, nor was Japan locked into a system of multilateral regional institutions comparable to NATO or the European Economic Community. As a result, unlike Germany, Japan did not need to rehabilitate its image in order to win regional acceptance. While Japan paid a price for its lack of penitence, most notably in delaying the normalization of relations with South Korea, it was a price that Japanese politicians at the time were willing to pay.

Of course, internal factors, including deficiencies in the conduct of the Tokyo War crimes trials, the preservation of the imperial court in Japan and the generally very conservative character of the post-war Japanese political establishment may have contributed to Japan's lack of penitence. Nonetheless, domestically at least the two countries were quite similar in wanting to bury the past, and in this they closely resembled much of the rest of Europe and Asia in the aftermath of the war.

The Development of a Discourse of Guilt – 1965-1991

The European “stillness” regarding the past was always precarious, and periodically incidents occurred that drew public attention to unresolved issues left over from the past. By the mid-1960s, however, a confluence of domestic factors in key European countries together with broader international trends put history back on the diplomatic agenda.

On the domestic level, generational change in the 1960s opened a window of opportunity for re-examining history. A generation of young people came to the fore unburdened by direct involvement with the misdeeds of the past, and without direct experience with how difficult these issues were to deal with. With them came a new willingness to re-open questions of moral responsibility for pre-1945 atrocities and to pursue once again issues of historical justice. Political leaders in some countries, such as Austria, chose to squash such inclinations. In others—such as France and West Germany—there were powerful political constituencies who decided to take up the issue and use the passions that it unleashed in order to pursue their broader political agendas. In Germany, the key actor was the Social Democratic government of Willi Brandt, which linked increased contrition regarding the past to a strengthening of German democracy and a bold, diplomatic campaign of seeking increased contact with the Communist countries of Eastern Europe.⁹ In France, it was left-wing political activists and intellectuals—many of them Jewish—who re-examined the issue of Vichy French collaboration in order to criticize the conservative governments and to challenge what they saw as a dangerous rise in anti-Israeli sentiments following the Six-Day War.¹⁰

Beyond these domestic political factors, two broad international trends favored reopening historical justice issues. The first of these was the steady development of human rights norms and growth of the array of international political and cultural institutions that supported their propagation and enforcement. Implicit in the concept of human rights is the notion of historical justice, both because the victims of past injustices need justice in order to achieve healing in the

⁹ David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57-58.

¹⁰ See Richard J. Goslan, “The Legacy of World War II in France: Mapping the Discourses of Memory,” in Lebow et. al., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, op. cit., 80-84.

present, and because of the widely shared conviction that unless human rights abuses of the past were condemned, it will be impossible to prevent their reoccurrence in the future. During the 1970s, human rights norms became a more prominent feature in the foreign policies of many countries, including the United States and the European Community (later European Union). They also began to have a growing impact on the media and popular culture, leading, among other things, to a renewed interest in the Holocaust and the crimes of the Third Reich.

The second international trend that pushed human rights up the international diplomatic agenda was the rise in international political and economic interdependence. As countries became increasingly interdependent, they also became increasingly sensitive to public opinion in other countries and increasingly vulnerable to lobbying by groups that represented the interests of the victims of historical injustices. In this way, the spread of human rights norms gave demands regarding historical justice increased legitimacy, while increased interdependence gave such demands practical political leverage.

As a result, there occurred a consolidation of opinion first in Germany and then elsewhere in Europe in favor of adopting a far-reaching stance of penance for the crimes of the Nazi era. Whereas in the 1960s and 70s, it had been the political left that had advocated confronting the darker side of modern German history, beginning in the 1980s conservatives like Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker came to favor contrition as well.¹¹ In other countries, such as France, while the overall constellation of political forces continued to support avoiding the issue, increased domestic and political pressures made it increasingly difficult to do so. This was particularly evident in the case of Austria, which underwent a series of diplomatic crises involving historical issues, the most notable of which was the virtual complete diplomatic blockade imposed on Austrian President Kurt Waldheim because of revelations concerning his long-concealed involvement in German intelligence in the Balkans during World War II. In short, while governments could continue to avoid historical justice issues, it was becoming increasingly costly for them to do so.¹²

Similar trends could be observed in Asia at the time. Like Germany, Japan came under increasing pressure to face up to the darker sides of its modern history, spurred on both by a vocal domestic left wing as well as by public opinion in both China and South Korea. Democratization in Korea, and limited, but significant, pluralization of discourse in China allowed victim groups to pressure their governments over historical justice issues. Increasingly, such groups—in particular those representing the Comfort Women in south Korea—couched their demands in the language of international human rights, giving them increased resonance across the international system, including the United States. Finally, as Japan became increasingly integrated in the regional system and dependent on its neighbors, its government found itself under growing pressure to respond in some form to these demands.

As Japan became more dependent on these countries first politically (as a result of the Cold War) and then economically, and as their political systems evolved to allow for greater expression of

¹¹ See David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past*, op. cit., 73-74.

¹² On the Austrian case and the shift to contrition, see David Art, *The Politics of the Nazi Past*, op. cit.; Hella Pick, *Guilty Victims: Austria from the Holocaust to Haidar* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000). See also Heidemarie Uhl, “From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis,” in Lebow, *Politics and Memory in Postwar Europe*, op. cit..

public opinion, Japan soon found itself forced to change its stance on historical issues. When the Japanese government moved towards a more affirmative view of the Japanese Empire—as it seemed to do in 1982 with regard to textbooks and again in 1985 when Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro made an official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo—it triggered sharp reactions in Seoul and Beijing. In response, the Ministry of Education issued new guidelines that stressed textbooks should be sensitive to the views of its neighbors. For his part, Prime Minister Nakasone for the first time recognized that World War II had been a war of invasion and that Japan had dominated its neighbors during the colonial period, and after 1985 he resisted pressures from the right wing of his party to visit Yasukuni again. Japan was slowly moving towards greater contrition to the history issue. Although it was far less penitent than Germany, it was arguably more contrite than most other European countries on historical issues, including Austria, France and Switzerland.

Reconciliation and its Limits – 1991 to the Present

The end of the Cold War in Europe appeared to consolidate the trends that had been set in motion in the previous two decades. Germany continued to maintain a highly penitent stance regarding its history, expanding the scope of its apology to groups that had been relatively ignored in the past (such as homosexuals and the Roma/Sinti people) and compensating long neglected victims of Third Reich abuses, most importantly the millions of former slave laborers who resided in East European countries. At the same time, countries that had once been relatively impenitent about the past adopted more contrite stances.

In some cases, the trigger for the shift to greater contrition came from domestic politics. For instance, in the case of France the rise of the far right Front National encouraged the conservative government of Jacques Chirac to apologize for the first time for the Vichy government's involvement in the rounding up of Jews during the German occupation. By acknowledging Vichy's role in the crimes of the Third Reich, French conservatives in effect stigmatized the Front National and its leader, Jean Marie Le Penn, who was known for his revisionist views on history. In other cases, the impetus came from abroad. For instance, Austria moved to a markedly more contrite stance on history in anticipation of joining the European Union.¹³ For its part, Switzerland was compelled to reconsider its stance on denying access to the dormant accounts to the families of Holocaust victims for fear of retaliation against Swiss business interests operating in the United States and elsewhere.¹⁴ Once made, these shifts were reinforced by the European Union. When in 2000 the far right Freedom Party under Jörg Haider joined the Austrian government, the European Union imposed a virtual diplomatic blockade on Austria until the Freedom Party signed a document clearly reaffirming Austria's shared responsibilities for the Holocaust.

At the same time as there was a deepening of contrition in Europe regarding the crimes of the Nazi era, the politics of historical justice became more complex and contentious as a broader range of issues joined the diplomatic agenda. This was particularly true of the question of

¹³ Günter Bischoff, "Victims? Perpetrators? 'Punching Bags' of European Historical Memory? The Austrians and their World War II Legacies," *German Studies Review* 27, no.1 (February 2004), 26.

¹⁴ Stuart E. Eizenstat, *Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor and the Unfinished Business of World War II* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003).

possible crimes that had been committed against the citizens of the Third Reich. Following the universal condemnation of the practice of ethnic cleansing during the bitter conflicts that broke out following the collapse of Yugoslavia, some German politicians and political groups began to raise with renewed vigor the question of acknowledging the suffering of the millions of ethnic Germans who had been driven out of Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War. This issue became a major point of dispute between the Federal Republic and Poland, poisoning diplomatic relations between the two countries from 2001 to 2007. Even more contentious were relations between Russia and some of the Soviet successor states, notably the Ukraine and the Baltic states.¹⁵

In the end, stability was regained in the German-Polish case after other European states sided with the Federal Government and made clear that further demands for political concessions because of the Nazi past were both unjustified and counterproductive. While the history issue did not disappear, it became more muted, a fact that was underlined by public opinion polls, which showed that the German and Polish people continued to have relatively positive views of one another even while they disagreed fiercely on historical issue after on.¹⁶ In the case of Russia and the other East European states, however, the best that could be done was to contain the issue.

Again, there are some remarkable parallels between the Asian and European cases. As in Europe, as Japanese sought to deepen its economic and political relations with other Asian countries, its leaders believed that they had to adopt a more contrite stance on history. When these efforts succeeded, it was possible to push relations forward, as occurred to a limited extent between Japan and Korea after the Kim Dae Jung-Obuchi Keizo summit of 1998. When they failed to do so, diplomatic relations were severely disrupted, as during the Koizumi years as a result of the Yasukuni shrine visits and the publishing of revisionist textbooks.

Unlike Europe, however, the constraining mechanisms of the European Union as well as the NATO military alliance were not in place. While high levels of economic interdependence between the Asian countries as well as the bilateral alliance system with the U.S. helped dampen conflict at least somewhat, they were not sufficient to stabilize ties on a lasting basis. Public and elite distrust remained much higher than in the European context, and increasingly the history issue began to spill over into other, potentially more dangerous areas—notably the array of territorial disputes between Asian countries such as Dokdo and the Senkakus (called Diaoyu in China).

Conclusions – Lessons for Korea and Asia

Asia is indeed different from Europe. And Europe itself is quite different from the Europe that is sometimes imagined in Asian debates over history. In the real Europe, apologies did not come

¹⁵ See Ivan I. Kurilla, “Memory Wars in the Post-Soviet Space,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* no. 63, 2009, accessed August 12, 2012, http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm_063.pdf.

¹⁶ See the useful survey material collected by the Warsaw based Institute on Public Affairs, especially Mateusz Falkowski and Agnieszka Popko, *The Germans about Poland and the Poles 2000-2006*, Mateusz Falkowski, *Meinungen der Polen über die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen nach dem Regierungswechsel in beidern Länder*, November 2005, especially pages 3, 7 and 8; and Jaroslaw Cwiek-Karpowicz, “Public Opinion on fears and hopes related to Russia and Germany,” accessed July 19, 2007, <http://www.isp.org.pl/?v=page&id=285&ln=eng>.

automatically for past transgressions, certainly not from the many European countries that had been involved in many of the horrors of the pre-1945 period, and not even from Germany, although it was more contrite than most. Apologies, compensation, and so forth came slowly, over time, and in response to much pressure and careful calculations of national interest. While Europe as a whole has achieved some degree of reconciliation over the misdeeds of the Third Reich, reconciliation remains an ongoing process that requires constant maintenance and can suffer serious setbacks, as the example of German-Polish relations between 2000 and 2007 has shown. On other issues, there is much that remains unresolved. In particular, the issue of Soviet misdeeds remains a potential time bomb.

Yet, while Europe is different from what it is imagined to be, its experiences hold some important lessons for Asia. Three points can be made in this regard. First, the European case reinforces the insight that the past can have serious implications for inter-state relations. When public opinion plays a role in foreign policy making, and when countries become increasingly interdependent with one another, the pressures to confront the history issue mount. When governments fail to respond to these pressures, the consequences can be severe. While wars have not been fought directly over questions of whether countries should apologize for the past or not, differences over these issues can have a profoundly disruptive impact. This is true even in Europe, where a high level of political integration has made the threat of actual military conflict relatively low. The risks in Asia are considerably greater, and today we see the history issue spilling over into territorial disputes, notably the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, which could potentially trigger a war.

Second, whether countries choose to deal with historical issues depends very much on calculations of interest. While the costs of ignoring past atrocities can be high, and are arguably increasing worldwide, the costs of trying to tackle them are high as well. Politicians who wish to adopt a more contrite stance on history risk offending powerful domestic constituencies. Resistance can be fierce and sustained, and can only be overcome through a significant expenditure of political capital and the exercise of leadership over time. Political leaders have to be convinced that there is a real payoff if they choose to do so. This requires in most instances some kind of assurance that the side that they are apologizing to is ready to reconcile with them and to pursue a more constructive relationship. In Austria, France and Switzerland, the resistance to recognizing past transgressions outweighed pressures to apologize into the 1990s. The same cannot be said of Russia, where there continues to be a nationalist tendency to glorify the Soviet past at the expense of relations with Russia's neighbors (although there has been some softening of Russian attitudes with regard to Poland, at least recently).

In this connection, democracy can be both a handicap and an asset. On the one hand, authoritarian governments are better able to suppress societal demands for justice for the sake of other political interests. On the other hand, the political legitimacy of democratically elected leaders may be an asset in this regard, since they may be able to reshape public attitudes better than is true of authoritarian ones. Reconciliation pursued between democratic states may be stronger and more lasting than is true among authoritarian ones. Thus, while the Polish government of the 1970s accepted Germany's apology in 1972, popular attitudes towards Germany did not begin to change until after Poland became democratic in the 1990s. Of course,

elected leaders may also succumb to the temptation to use nationalism to boost their domestic popularity, a tactic that authoritarians are also known to resort to.

Third and finally, the European experience suggests that a sustained and comprehensive effort is needed to pursue genuine reconciliation. It is not enough to simply meet, apologize and rhetorically agree to move past history. To make the reconciliation process stronger and more durable requires a sustained campaign across a range of political issues, including political rhetoric, education, commemoration (museums, memorials, etc.) and compensation of victims groups.

Applying these lessons to the Asian context suggests that South Korea and Japan should have a real opportunity to move forward. The practical incentives to try to reconcile are powerful and growing, especially in light of a potentially unstable, nuclear armed North Korea and an increasingly powerful and assertive People's Republic of China. Moreover, as democratic societies with many common values and interests, Japan and the ROK should be better placed to pursue a more lasting sort of reconciliation than is true between Japan and the PRC. While on moral and ethical grounds it may be desirable for Japan to address the suffering that was inflicted on the Chinese people, the clashes in national interests between the two countries suggest that it may be difficult to do so. The fact that the PRC remains very much an authoritarian government likewise suggests that the ability to fundamentally reshape public attitudes may be more limited.

To initiate such a process of reconciliation will require real and sustained leadership, both in Tokyo and in Seoul. Japan and Korea in fact began to go down this road after the Kim Dae Jung-Keizo Obuchi summit meeting of 1998, leading to a mark improvement in public perceptions of one another and an increase in inter-state relations. Unfortunately, Japan assumed that the issue had been resolved and subsequent governments took steps that reignited the controversy, most notably by approving the use of revisionist textbooks and Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni. For its part, the Korean government failed to coordinate with Japan on its efforts to make amends for the past, a pattern which began already under Kim Dae Jung's predecessor, Kim Young Sam, with respect to the Comfort Women.

This time, Japanese leaders need to not only adopt a strong rhetorical stance of apologizing for the transgressions for the past, they will need to back it up with a program of commemoration, education, and compensation for victims groups—beginning with the surviving Comfort Women and their families. Korean leaders in turn need to find ways to demonstrate to Japan that such a penitent stance will have a positive and lasting impact on relations between the two countries and work with them to stage manage the reconciliation process. Both sides will also need to agree to shelve the Dokdo/Takeshima issue and find some way of underlining their joint commitment to continued cooperation on maritime issues.

At this juncture in time, political weaknesses in the two countries will make it very difficult to take advantage of this opportunity. The demands of the highly competitive Korean electoral cycle, and the weakness of both the LDP and the DPJ in the upcoming elections in Japan, will make it almost impossible in the coming months for leaders in either country to take positions that might be deemed to be insufficiently patriotic. Once in place, the new leaderships will have an opportunity to place the two countries relationship on a more stable footing by systematically

addressing the issues that divide them. If they do so, they will contribute significantly to the peace and prosperity in the Asian region. Much as Franco-German reconciliation in the 1950s laid the foundations for a new Europe, improved Japanese-Korean relations can provide the kernel around which a truly integrated East Asia can form.

The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views
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