

On the 70th Anniversary of the End of World War II: What Can Northeast Asian Nations Learn from the European Example of Historical Reconciliation?¹

By Andrew Horvat

Abstract:

This paper represents an attempt to place the debate on history in Northeast Asia in a structural context and to see it as an outcome of tensions in state-civil society organization (CSO) relationships in Japan and South Korea. The paper uses as an analytical tool the work of Lily Gardner Feldman who has focused on the roles of transnational non-state actors (TNAs) in post-World War II reconciliation in Europe. Although Northeast Asian CSOs and European TNAs do not always overlap precisely, most of Gardner Feldman's TNAs qualify as CSOs according to standard definitions of civil society. This paper argues that geopolitical differences notwithstanding, moves toward reconciliation after World War II in Europe were greatly helped by the presence of legally sanctioned, transnationally active, broad-based CSOs. Conversely, the past suppression of civil society activity in both South Korea and Japan – in the former physically under successive military-backed authoritarian regimes and in the latter as part of the statist philosophy of government imported from Europe in the late nineteenth century – has held in check forces for reconciliation and encouraged the emergence of generally anti-government CSOs which use history as a tool in their struggles against their political elites.

Key words: historical reconciliation, transnational non-state actors, civil society, comfort women, history textbooks, Yasukuni Shrine

Introduction -- East Asia's History Problem

Some 70 years after the end of World War II, history remains a contested area in Northeast Asia. Unlike in much of Europe, where citizens of formerly mutually hostile nations appear to have achieved a shared perception of the past, in Northeast Asia an opposite trend has emerged: Cold War era treaties are being challenged by public intellectuals and civil society organizations (CSOs) active both on the left and the right. A veritable polarization of "visions of the past" has become apparent both in Japan, the former aggressor state, and South Korea, heir to a legacy of Japanese colonial rule.

¹ An earlier version of this paper appeared under the title "A Strong State, Weak Civil Society and Cold War Geopolitics; why Japan lags behind Europe in confronting a negative past," in Shin, Gi-wook et al eds. *Rethinking Historical Injustice in Northeast Asia*, 2006, Routledge/Stamford, New York, pp. 216-34. N.B. The primary focus of this paper is the successful record of reconciliation in Europe in contrast to the long list of unresolved legacies of colonial rule and war in East Asia. Although the 1972-76 German-Polish textbook talks resulted in many breakthroughs which came to be reflected in history textbooks in Poland and West Germany, progress in coming to terms with the legacy of World War II has been slow in other former East Bloc countries in spite of the regime changes of the early 1990s. The mixed record of East European governments in dealing with difficult aspects of the past is a topic that shall be treated in future papers.

Partly as a consequence of the flowering of civil society in South Korea and Japan after the end of the Cold War, debate focusing on negative aspects of the past has triggered a virtual avalanche of publications both popular and academic about the legacy of pre-1945 Japanese colonial policies. Many works, even those written by scholars, however, have often taken a moralistic approach blaming past and present political leaders for failing to address the sufferings of the weakest victims of past state crimes, or else (in the case of the Japanese right) for kowtowing to foreign pressure and tendering “needless apologies.”

The paper argues that while domestic politicization of history has not been the only factor in recent diplomatic difficulties between Japan and South Korea, new perspectives could be gained – and hopefully new policies could be formulated – through an examination of the structures and history of advocacy CSOs in Japan and South Korea and their relationships with the state. While historical and geopolitical differences between Europe and Northeast Asia cannot be ignored, they would appear to be insufficient to explain the contrast between constructive dialogues on the history issue in Europe versus the chorus of public denunciations not just of public officials but also of rival CSO groups active in the history field in Japan and South Korea. In marked contrast to Europe, where TNAs have played a leading role in pushing toward reconciliation, in Northeast Asia a contrary picture emerges with CSOs demanding historical justice often in the name of highly visible victims of colonial subjugation, such as forced laborers or military “sex slaves,” who often double as symbols for nationalist and feminist agendas of the advocacy groups that have adopted them.

For practical reasons, this paper confines its scope to Japan-South Korea relations. Although Japan has yet to deal with North Korea on a long list of unresolved issues, the limited dialogue between Tokyo and Pyongyang takes place only among officials since North Korea, a dictatorship, lacks a civil society sector. Likewise, in the case of China, in spite of recent moves by the government to promote the growth of a non-profit sector, advocacy groups are generally absent. Among Japan-PRC dialogues on history the most productive ones have been those between Japanese scholars and Chinese counterparts residing outside China.

Some seven decades after the collapse of the Japanese Empire in 1945, hardly a day goes by without some reference in the media to unresolved disputes between Japan and its neighbors. The list of pending issues between Japanese and Koreans on the one hand and Japanese and Chinese on the other is virtually endless. But, whether the subject is the numbers killed in the Rape of Nanking, official Japanese visits to Yasukuni Shrine, financial compensation for wartime forced labor, the contents of Japanese history textbooks, the manner of recruitment of the “ianfu” (so-called comfort women) who provided sexual services to Japanese military personnel and a select group of civilians throughout the Asia Pacific under Japanese control, the legality of the annexation of the Korean peninsula by Japan or the nature of the relationship between Japanese and their colonial subjects, every dispute can be reduced to a competition among nations (as well as groups within each nation) for the right to dictate the dominant narrative. The multiplicity of competing visions of the past reflects changes in power relationships both

regionally and within domestic boundaries. The absence of reconciliation speaks volumes about realignments in relationships, a rising China and a faltering Japan, as well as the emergence of new groups demanding that their vision of history be the one to define the identity of their nation. One can raise questions about whether in such a state of flux any kind of activity by transnational non-state actors could help bring about reconciliation, but one can say that the relative absence of transnational links among the three nations does have a negative impact on the history problem. The example of Europe, where after a tragic war national governments agreed to gradually pool sovereignty in order to create new regional institutions aimed at promoting prosperity and security stands in marked contrast to Northeast Asia where nation states continue to vie with one another for natural resources and overseas markets. Just as Europe's success in forging a shared vision of the past was part of continental integration in other fields, so the continuing competition among national narratives reflects the presence of strong states and weak transnational actors in Northeast Asia.

Transnational Non-State Actors – the European Experience

In her analysis of the German government's attempts to improve relations with France, Poland, Israel and the Czech Republic after World War II, Gardner Feldman creates four categories of TNA-state relations: TNAs can act as catalysts, complements, conduits or competitors. Gardner Feldman writes: "As catalyst or competitor, it is the TNA that dictates the terms of reference, with the German government performing in a more reactive mode. When TNAs are complements the government sets the overall tone. The role of catalyst or competitor involves relations of tension with the government, whereas activity as complement or conduit by TNAs suggests harmonious relations."²

Gardner Feldman offers many examples of faith based catalytic activities such as the outreach by the French Protestant church to German POWs in the immediate post WWII period, the missives of the German Evangelical church to Poland in the 1960s, the exchange of letters between German and Polish Catholic bishops, similar attempts between German and Czech Catholic leaders, and the formation of the Societies of Christian-Jewish Cooperation promoting ties between Germany and Israel. With regard to TNAs as complements, Gardner Feldman focuses on the various school book commissions whose aim was to "decontaminate"³ school history textbooks by removing from them one-sided nationalistic versions of the past. Also in the complement category are TNAs, mostly NGOs, engaged in the promotion of exchanges including "youth

² Gardner Feldman, p. 3.

³ Wolfgang Hoepken, former director of the Georg Eckert Institute of International Textbook Research writes, "An early goal of the [Georg Eckert] institute was to eliminate, through collaboration with international partners, the hostile images and negative stereotyping of other people and countries, which early textbooks had promoted, and thereby to come to a consensual narrative of past and contemporary history. Its basic intention was the "decontamination" of textbooks and historic concepts that had been poisoned by nationalistic misuse of history." Andrew Horvat and Gebhard Hielscher, eds. *Sharing the Burden of the Past: Legacies of War in Europe, America and Asia*, The Asia Foundation/Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Tokyo 2003) p.3.

associations, sports clubs, language centers, training centers, trade unions, schools, universities and town twinning organizations.”⁴

To explain the role of conduits, Gardner Feldman homes in on the activities of the German political foundations: the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Social Democratic Party), the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Christian Democratic Party) and the Friedrich Neumann Stiftung (Free Democratic Party). While all of these foundations are supported from the public purse, they function independently of the state. All three have offices outside Germany and engage actively with the publics and opinion leaders of former enemy countries, holding symposiums, administering scholarships and generally promoting activities stressing shared values of democracy, free markets and human rights.⁵

As for competition, Gardner Feldman provides examples of organizations opposed to the German government’s policies of reconciliation. In the case of Israel, competition from TNAs refers to the clandestine activities of former Nazi scientists who tried to help Egypt develop nuclear weapons in the 1950s, and the recent public questioning of Germany’s Middle East policies by a younger generation of Germans sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. In the case of Poland and the Czech Republic, German governments have faced internal opposition to rapprochement from large groups of expellees, ethnic Germans forced to flee from these two countries after Nazi Germany’s defeat in 1945.

Are there Asian TNAs?

The above descriptions raise certain obvious questions. Are there TNAs active in reconciliation between Japan and South Korea or Japan and China? If such TNAs exist, do they function as catalysts, conduits, complements or competitors to the Japanese government? If TNAs do not exist, or if they exist but in far smaller numbers, what might be the reason for such a state of affairs? What other factors, such as regional geopolitics, could account for differences in approaches to historical problems in the two areas? Finally, if functioning TNAs are not in evidence, what other opportunities exist for Japanese and third-country policy-makers to promote reconciliation?

First of all, the role of religious organizations as TNAs in Northeast Asia is extremely limited. The last time Koreans and Japanese shared a faith that transcended national boundaries was in the 14th century when Buddhism was practiced widely in both Japan and on the Korean peninsula. The legacy of good relations of those days consists of about 100 Korean Buddhist paintings now in the possession of a number of Japanese temples.⁶ Although today some 40 percent of South Korea’s 47 million citizens say they

⁴ Gardner Feldman, p. 7.

⁵ On a personal note, my own interest in European models of reconciliation was greatly stimulated thanks to the work of Gebhard Hielscher, a former Tokyo representative of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung with whom I cooperated in hosting a series of symposiums aimed at introducing the European experience in historical reconciliation to policy communities in Japan and South Korea.

⁶ In 2004 Korean and Japanese newspapers reported that a number of the Korean Buddhist paintings, stolen from a Buddhist temple in Akashi, in western Japan, had turned up in South Korea. The thieves, two South Koreans, stated at their trial that they felt no remorse since the paintings were originally Korean. Other than

are Christians, in the case of Japan, less than one percent of the population has adopted the foreign faith. Moreover, while Christians in both Japan and Korea are represented heavily among groups supporting the *ianfu* (“comfort women,”) the kind of large scale faith based activities common in Europe in connection with historical issues are unknown in Northeast Asia. (Since Christians were persecuted in the PRC during the first decades of communism and religion in general remains under government supervision, transnational activity by Christian churches between Japan and China is, for the time being, inconceivable.)

We can also eliminate from the patterns the conduit roles played by Germany’s three political foundations.⁷ No such organizations exist in Japan, South Korea or the PRC. In the case of Japan, most transnational activity in international relations is either in the hands of government supported organizations or else a handful of large foundations which according to law must report to “competent governmental agencies.” As explained below, the overwhelming strength of the state in comparison to civil society has inhibited the development of Japanese NGOs and therefore has made it extremely difficult for all but a handful of civil society organizations to function as TNAs.

One of very few Japanese NGOs that can be described as having a significant track record as an active TNA in historical issues is Peaceboat, which organizes cruises to all parts of the world holding on-board seminars aimed at achieving better understanding of the viewpoints of Japan’s neighbors. Peaceboat supports its activities through fees it collects from cruise participants.⁸ Founded in 1982 when attempts to remove from Japanese history textbooks references to aggression on the Asian mainland triggered anti-Japanese demonstrations in Seoul and an official protest from Beijing, Peaceboat has grown into a mainstream, national organization with broad-based support throughout the country. Posters advertising its cruises to North Korea, the Middle East, Cuba and Africa (to meet members of exploited indigenous groups) can be seen on the walls of restaurants, coffee shops, language schools and colleges even in remote communities. The fact that individual Japanese spend as much as \$10,000 each to take part in the cruises indicates a

a small group of scholars in South Korea and Japan few people recognize that these paintings represent a shared cultural legacy and that they predate the invasions of Korea by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the late 16th century or Japan’s colonial domination of Korea in the 20th century, eras when Japan did in fact plunder Korea of its cultural artifacts. In 2012, another group of thieves from South Korea stole two Buddhist statues of Korean origin from temples on the Japanese island of Tsushima. One of the statues was returned in July 2015. As of present writing Japanese diplomats are still negotiating for the return of the second stolen statue.

⁷ The Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy attempted in 2000 to encourage the creation of a Japanese foundation devoted to advocacy of democracy throughout Asia. As of present writing no Japanese political foundation with aims and programs similar to the German Stiftungen or with transnational capacity has been set up.

⁸ Peaceboat’s ability to function as a TNA is closely related to the success of its business model. A disproportionately high percentage of the income of Japanese NGOs in the humanitarian and social development field, an area in which Peaceboat is also active, comes from “for profit” activities that are necessitated by the lack of other kinds of support either from government or private foundations. As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, although the 1998 NPO law has provided civil society organizations with legal status it has not given them the tax exemptions that might make it possible for them to grow into financially stable organizations capable of acting as TNAs in any of the various roles described by Gardner-Feldman.

willingness to invest both time and money in getting to know the often negative views of one's neighbors.⁹ In taking on the task of holding shipboard conferences in ports of both Koreas, Taiwan, the PRC and Russia – countries with which Japan has historical and territorial disputes – Peaceboat has the potential of acting as a catalyst for future inter-governmental action. One of its former leaders, Tsujimoto Kiyomi, is a long-serving member of the Japanese parliament. Its ship-board lecturers represent a broad cross-section of Japanese society, from leading public intellectuals to television cooking instructors.

VAWW (Violence Against Women in War – Network Japan), a feminist NGO mentioned below, is a more typical small-scale organization, unusual only in that it functions actively as a TNA. Organizer of a mock trial in December 2000 which found the late Emperor Hirohito guilty of war crimes, VAWW acts as a competitor to the Japanese government. Nicola Piper writes, “VAWW-NET Japan is one of the few Japanese groups active on behalf of gendered violence generally, and the ‘comfort women’ issue in particular, which has strong transnational links. The original, and possibly still the main impetus for concrete lobbying at the international level, however, seems to come from Korean groups.” Although a comparison of the Japanese and South Korean civil society sectors is beyond the scope of this paper, Piper is correct in highlighting the far greater level of activity on the part of South Korean NGOs, especially on the issue of the former comfort women.¹⁰

Contrasting Geopolitics – America's Faustian Bargain

Without a doubt, the geopolitical environment of post-World War II Europe created conditions in which historical reconciliation could be seen as being in the national interest of each state. In the case of East Asia, the Cold War demarcation line (commonly referred to as the “bamboo curtain”) placed Japan and the People's Republic of China in opposing camps, thus making it impossible to carry on exchanges about the past. In the case of Korea, division and war, followed by decades of poverty conspired to delay coming to terms with a complicated relationship with Japan. As for Japan, the cold war

⁹ Peaceboat is international in ways that many Japanese NGOs involved in international relations are not: a significant number of its employees and volunteers are Japanese-speaking foreign nationals. Other than operating cruises, Peaceboat works together with the European Centre for Conflict Prevention to put on conferences and symposiums on peace-building.

¹⁰ Nicola Piper, “Transnational women's activism in Japan and Korea: the unresolved issue of military sexual slavery,” *Global Networks* 1, 2 (2001) pp. 155-170 (ISSN 1470-2266) p. 163. Piper makes reference to a suggestion that “many Korean feminist groups draw on a nationalist discourse of the comfort women as embodying foreign domination of Korea.” This question has serious implications for future, broad-based transnational activity since the Japanese and South Korean NGOs focus on the comfort women issue for totally different reasons: for the officially approved South Korean women's groups the sufferings of the former comfort women are part of a narrative of national humiliation, a shared tragedy with symbolic meaning, the constant retelling of which is part of an exercise in patriotism; for the much smaller Japanese feminist NGOs the sufferings of the comfort women are part of a gender politics for which, at least for the time being, there is little broad-based support in Japan. In the context of a Europe-Asia comparison, this rift is highly significant: TNA activity in Europe represented a desire on the part of people of diverse nationalities to forge a shared vision of the past.

created domestic ideological divisions, which would make certain that Japan would lack the domestic consensus¹¹ on historical issues necessary to engage former victims and enemies in constructive dialogue.

Contrasting geopolitics meant that in Europe de-Nazification of Germany became absolutely necessary for the harmonious functioning of NATO. In Japan, however, the Cold War necessitated the mobilization of Japan's pre-war elite – including officials who had overseen aggressive expansion and colonial exploitation – in order to turn Japan into a prosperous ally in the war against communism. But, reaching out to Japan's pre-war politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders forced the US to enter into a Faustian bargain: the Western alliance would get an efficient, prosperous Japan with an anti-communist government, but dealing with Japan's negative historical legacy would have to be shelved. The Japanese left which had originally welcomed the Allied victory over Japan as paving the way for democracy through the purging of pre-war leaders felt betrayed when Washington embraced, among others, Kishi Nobusuke,¹² a member of the wartime cabinet of Tōjō Hideki, helping him become prime minister in 1957.

One can understand that given the context of the Cold War, mobilizing Japan in the effort to contain communism had to have been a top US foreign policy priority, however, the resulting failure of Japan's elites to come to terms with negative aspects of their country's past would forever politicize reconciliation, providing both domestic and foreign critics of Japan ammunition with which to embarrass the government and its leaders. It is for this reason that Japan has never been able to adopt high school history textbooks that deal with Japan's record of aggression on the Asian mainland in a manner that has satisfied Chinese, Korean and domestic Japanese constituencies of either the Left or the Right. For example, news reports of a move in 1982 by the Japanese Ministry of Education to substitute the word *shinryaku* (aggression) with *shinkō* (advance) to describe Japan's takeover of Korea and subsequently large parts of China was enough to trigger massive demonstrations in Seoul and a protest from Beijing. To this day, Japanese nationalists accuse the domestic Left of having instigated the crisis by egging Chinese leaders to express official displeasure about the change in wording. Although there is little evidence that China (or Korea) needed to be incited to protest, the fact that one hears such accusations within Japan even today is indication of the ill will historical issues can generate domestically.

While it is true that the Ministry of Education has shown a tendency to gloss over negative aspects of the country's recent history, since the early 1980's most high school

¹¹ “[T]hose who stick to the pacifist constitution – mainly on the Left – will use, as a reason for their position, the fact that the Japanese cannot be trusted with military power. Look what happened in World War II. It was uniquely atrocious and horrible and should never happen again. The more they make those arguments, those who are interested in changing the constitution and want Japan to regain the sovereign right to wage war will have to minimize the historical facts with comments like ‘every country has waged a war like that and besides it was an anti-colonial war.’ ” Ian Buruma, “Commentary” in Horvat and Hielscher eds. *Sharing the Burden...* 140.

¹² Kishi is Prime Minister Abe's maternal grandfather.

history textbooks have mentioned sensitive issues.¹³ Although there has been backtracking in recent years and as described above, there are indications that as a result of pressure from nationalist politicians the Ministry of Education is likely to encourage schools to use the Tsukuru Kai textbook, the problem at present is not so much the textbooks themselves but the fact that in the absence of reconciliation – either domestic or international – both critics and supporters of the government look to the textbooks in search of a definitive official statement on how the Japanese state views the nation’s past. For this reason, every textbook is scrutinized by opposing camps in search of what they believe are changes in the official position on issues such as the Rape of Nanking, the “comfort women,” or colonial rule of Korea, which all inevitably lead to accusations of having either whitewashed the past or kowtowed to Beijing and Seoul.

The Asian Women’s Fund Debacle – Comfort Women Conundrum

The Japanese government-inspired program to compensate surviving *ianfu* offers a textbook case of obstacles posed by the combination of strong state, weak civil society and a divisive political environment to the resolution of historical issues. Confronted in 1992 with irrefutable evidence of official involvement in the recruitment of tens of thousands of Asian and some European women to work as de facto wartime prostitutes, the Japanese government came under pressure from two sides: on the one hand from the left to accept legal responsibility, show sincere contrition, and provide compensation, and on the other, from the right, to stick to the official position that all pending claims have been fully settled by the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty and subsequent international agreements.

Unused to collaborating with non-state actors and confident that officials are best suited to handling international crises, bureaucrats took the lead and encouraged a group of scholars and prominent individuals to act as advisors to a foundation set up with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In spite of its noble purpose -- to apologize and pay compensation to former *ianfu* from countries occupied by Japan -- both prior to its creation and thereafter, the Asian Women’s Fund (AWF, in Japanese: *Josei no tame no Ajia heiwa kokumin kikin*, or, literally Japanese Citizens’ Asian Peace Fund for Women) became a hated symbol of leftists and nationalists alike. Funding for AWF came mostly from the Japanese government but also, significantly, from voluntary contributions made by private individuals, who felt sympathy for the aging *ianfu*.

Although the reasons for combining public and private funding were largely legalistic, the AWF did break new ground in being the first Japanese organization that sought to deal with a controversial historical problem as a public-private partnership. Set up in 1995 under Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, a former socialist, AWF sailed into controversy the following year, when Hashimoto Ryûtarô, a political conservative

¹³ “Robert Fish, a Ph. D. candidate at the University of Hawaii, examined all major editions of Japanese high school history texts published by the three largest publishers in the postwar period. He found that Nanking is included by all three publishers, which account for roughly 75 percent of the market.” Charles Burrell, “The American Indictment: The Japan That Can’t Say Sorry,” in Horvat and Hielscher eds. *Sharing the Burden...* 127.

who replaced Murayama, reportedly resisted signing individual letters of apology to surviving comfort women. Hashimoto was also said to have opposed the idea of using funds directly from the national budget to make compensation payments on the grounds that doing so would undermine Japan's official position that all claims against Japan had been settled. Although Hashimoto did eventually sign the letters of apology, the news of his hesitation severely undermined the mission of the fund.¹⁴

Since, at Japanese government insistence, the comfort women could receive direct payments only from donations given by private citizens, critics could argue that the government was using AWF as a smokescreen to sidestep its legal responsibility and avoid making official payments of compensation. Korean and Taiwanese NGOs put pressure on the *ianfu* under their care to refuse both the financial compensation from the AWF and the letter of apology from the Japanese prime minister on the grounds that neither represented a sincere act of the Japanese state. In their move to oppose the AWF's attempts to compensate the *ianfu*, the Korean and Taiwanese NGOs were supported by counterpart organizations active in gender rights issues in Japan. What followed was a sad sight: seven former Korean comfort women faced severe public criticism for having accepted funds from the AWF. As a result of this public condemnation, the AWF made all subsequent payments in private, refusing to divulge the names of recipients.¹⁵ In the end, the AWF was able to compensate no more than 285 former comfort women.¹⁶

AWF vs. German Future Fund

What the AWF debacle illustrates is that Japanese NGOs working in the history field bear such strong animosity against their own government that even when political leaders do take steps to compensate survivors the pursuit of a political struggle against the state appears to the NGOs to be more attractive than compromise on behalf of long-suffering, elderly victims. It would seem that reconciliation is not part of the vocabulary

¹⁴ Bureaucrats did dip into the public purse to make payments to former comfort women by setting up a separate budget item for "medical needs." These funds, which were calculated depending on the costs of medical care in the women's home countries, varied between the equivalent of US\$12,000 in the case of the Philippines to US\$30,000 for Korean, Taiwanese and Dutch women. The official funds, however, were not paid directly to the women but on their behalf to medical and other institutions in their home countries as part of an elaborate arrangement designed to avoid criticism that the payments undermined Japan's official position that it owed no compensation to foreign individuals. (Personal interview with Ms Momoyo Ise, former director of AWF, October 8, 2005.) For a detailed description of the use of both private and government funds, see "*Ianfu*" *mondai to Ajia josei kikin*, "The 'comfort women' problem and the Asian Women's Fund," AWF September 2004.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive treatment of the Asian Women's Fund and its difficulties in providing compensation to *ianfu*, please see: C. Sarah Soh, "Japan's National/Asian Women's Fund for 'Comfort Women,'" *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 76, No. 2 pp 209-233. Soh observes: "Despite the assumed good will of the advocates for the victims they represent, it is necessary for supporters and observers alike to be alert regarding the insidious workings of power relations found in most political movements, the leaders of which are apt to maneuver and disregard the voices of the subaltern (as in the case of dissenting South Korean survivors) even after they have spoken."

¹⁶ *Tsugunai jigyo wo oeta ima*, (Final report on the conclusion of the atonement program), Program report, AWF, 2002, p. 5.

of the Japanese (or Korean) NGOs that have supported former comfort women in their struggles against the Japanese government.¹⁷

The inability of the AWF to carry out its goals is truly sad because in spite of its flaws, it bears a remarkable structural similarity to the German Future Fund, which by contrast has been a success.¹⁸ Both funds were set up to address unresolved historical issues, initially reluctantly by two former aggressor states.¹⁹ In the case of the German fund, the need was to provide compensation for the approximately one million surviving victims of Nazi forced labor mostly from former communist countries, who, because of the division of Europe during the Cold War could not benefit from previous compensation schemes. Both the Japanese and the German governments chose a formula in which both government and private funds were mobilized. In both Germany and Japan, conservative forces resisted the compensation schemes and in both countries industry was most reluctant to contribute to the funds.

But, by 2000, just two years after law suits were brought against German companies in US courts by survivors of Nazi forced labor, the fund “Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future” was set up and fully functioning. By making contributions to the fund tax deductible, Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder was able to obtain the cooperation of 3,000 German companies. Other than paying out about \$7.5 billion in compensation to nearly a million survivors, the Fund also undertakes programs such as arranging for traveling photographic exhibitions on Nazi forced labor, the disbursement of scholarships to needy students, and recently even a German speech contest by Polish children in Gdansk (formerly Danzig) where the opening shots of World War II were fired.

By way of contrast, the AWF finished compensating individual former comfort women in 2002 and wound up all activities in 2007. (No plans exist to commemorate the sufferings of the comfort women, to offer scholarships to needy women in the lands where the comfort women were recruited, and no Japanese language speech contests are to be sponsored in neighboring countries at least not by the AWF since it no longer exists.) The AWF debacle highlights the inadequacy of Japanese institutions –

¹⁷ In the dispute over the AWF between the government and activist NGOs, it is not too difficult to perceive a political fault line. Apichai Shipper and Loren King write in “Associative Activism and Democratic Transformation in Japan” (unpublished paper, MIT, 18 February 2002), “...103 of 107 Japanese staff and volunteers of these groups had never voted for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party....” (p.20) Although Shipper and King studied NGOs involved in supporting illegal foreign workers and victims of trafficking, a number of the same organizations have taken anti-government positions on the former comfort women.

¹⁸ For accounts of events leading up to the creation of the German Future Fund, please see Otto Graf Lambsdorff, “The Long Road toward the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility, and the Future,” and J.D. Bindenagel, “US-German Negotiations on and Executive Agreement Concerning the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility, and the Future,” in Horvat and Hielscher eds. *Sharing the Burden...* pp 152-160, and pp 161-172 respectively.

¹⁹ The German Future Fund (official name, Fund for Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future”) was set up in response to the launching of a number of lawsuits against German companies in the United States by survivors of Nazi forced labor. Chancellor Helmut Kohl, a conservative, had opposed any arrangements to pay former slave laborers. http://www.religioustolerance.org/fin_nazi.htm September 25, 2015.

governmental or civil society -- to give voice to the clearly articulated wishes of the majority of Japanese to see victims of past aggression properly compensated.²⁰

Downside Effects of Japan's State-Centered Society

But perhaps the most important difference in dealing with history in Europe versus Northeast Asia is the relative weakness of Japanese civil society organizations of any kind. It is crucial to stress the middle initial of TNA, i.e. the non-state aspect. Until very recently, in all three countries in the region, Japan, South Korea and the PRC, the coming together of ordinary citizens for the kinds of activities that might promote historical reconciliation with neighboring countries has been strictly controlled by the state. For this reason, TNA activity in any of the four categories cited by Gardner Feldman can be expected to take place on a far smaller scale between Japan and South Korea, than for example between Germany and France, even though the former two neighbors have a combined population well in excess of the latter two. In Japan, until the coming into effect of a new Non-Profit Organization Law in 1998, advocacy groups, environmental organizations, in fact all but large-scale corporate foundations had virtually no hope of obtaining legal status. Without legal status NGOs could not rent offices, lease telephone lines, open bank accounts (needed to receive donations) or hire employees.

Although Article 34 of the Japanese Civil Code, the law defining the activities of NGOs and NPOs has been in force virtually unchanged between 1896 and the present day, the definition of permitted activities for private non-profit groups was actually narrowed in the 1970s and would not be broadened for almost 30 years – not until after the 1995 Kobe Earthquake when an embarrassed central government was forced to admit that it needed to harness the energies of ordinary citizens to cope with emergencies. The bursting of the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s and the sudden aging of the Japanese workforce a decade later put new strains on social services alerting policy-makers to the need to promote the growth of the non-profit sector. Until that time, Article 34 limited non-state or non-profit activity to so-called *kôeki hôjin*, literally “public benefit juridical persons” commonly translated as “public benefit corporations,” or “foundations.” An international survey of the non-profit sectors of some 40 countries described the challenges facing Japanese wishing to take part in civil society activities in the latter part of the twentieth century in the following words:

“In order to establish a *kôeki hôjin*, approval by the ‘competent governmental agency’ is required.... [I]t is a very difficult and time-consuming process, except

²⁰ See Saaler, Sven, *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion – The History Textbook Controversy and Japanese Society* Judicium, Munich, 2005. Quoting the results of a survey of Japanese public opinion about Japanese war responsibility carried out by NHK, Japan's public broadcasting network in 2000, Saaler concludes, “The results suggest that a clear majority of Japanese believe that Japan still has continuing responsibility for the war [World War II], a belief that follows logically from the perception of the war as a war of aggression.” In the survey referred to by Saaler, 51 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “World War II was a war of aggression by Japan against its neighbors.” Just 15 percent of those surveyed disagreed with that question. Fifty percent also agreed that “unresolved problems” required the attention of “later generations....” p.143.

when the government itself takes the lead in establishing a *kôeki hôjin*. Moreover, approval is also subject to the discretion of the officer in charge of the application case, and no clearly stated and standardized criteria for incorporation exist. One of the major obstacles to creating a *kôeki hôjin* is the substantial amount of financial assets required by the public authorities prior to the actual establishment of the organization. The actual amount may vary from case to case, but it is very difficult for groups of citizens to accumulate assets of 300 million yen (US \$2.3 million) or more, as required by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”²¹

An example of the negative impact that an overwhelmingly state-centered political system can have on transnational civil society activity in reconciliation is the refusal in 1997 by the Japanese committee of UNESCO to accept an invitation from its South Korean counterpart to initiate a dialogue on the teaching of history in high schools. In proposing the textbook talks, South Korea was following the precedent of UNESCO mediation between West Germany and Poland on history issues begun in 1972 and concluded successfully four years later. The reason for the Japanese refusal was simple: Japan’s UNESCO committee is a part of the Japanese Ministry of Education. Officials charged with representing UNESCO one year, may be transferred to the department that oversees high school history textbooks the following year. In a state-centered society, such as Japan’s, there is little room for non-state actors.²²

Although the new NPO Law permits NGOs to obtain legal status through a much simplified reporting procedure, it still takes as long as three months to obtain approval. Moreover, tax exempt status has to be applied for separately; it is granted only rarely and often after long months of negotiations with officials. Since tax exempt status is reviewed regularly, the whole procedure must be repeated usually with a new group of officials. No wonder thousands of Japanese NGOs have opted against obtaining legal status even under the new much more liberal NPO Law.

“Sky Clear” for Demonstrations

This kind of legal environment – both past and present – has had far reaching negative consequences for the development of large-scale mainstream civil society organizations in Japan and has kept all but the most zealous activists out of such sectors as human rights, advocacy and other related activities common to the NGO communities of other industrially developed democratic societies. Without legal status, Japanese NGOs have been unable to provide either salaries or fringe benefits for staff. To work full time for organizations devoted to causes such as historical justice, or human rights of foreign workers, still requires sacrifices that an average individual can hardly afford. (One Japanese NGO leader I know postponed marriage until he was 40 because he could not earn enough to support a family.) In the 1970s and 1980s, most Japanese NGOs had

²¹ Takayoshi Amenomori, “Defining the Nonprofit Sector: Japan,” in Lester M. Salamon, and Helmut K. Anheier, “Working Papers of The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, 1993, p.8

²² *Rekishi kyôkasho kenkyû – Kankoku teian wo Nihon kyohi*, (Japan rejects South Korean invitation to engage in joint history textbook research), Hokuriku Chûnichi Shimbun evening edition page 1, July 22, 1997.

no permanent offices. If they did have an office, it would be rented in the name of its most prominent member, someone who paid the equivalent of US\$1,000 needed until recently to obtain a single telephone line and who also lent his or her name to the organization's bank account, who obtained donations from wealthy individuals and who paid the meager salaries of one or possibly two part time employees. Perhaps a dozen other members worked as pure volunteers. Too heavy reliance on a single "charismatic leader" has turned many Japanese NGOs into undemocratic units where members are so dependent on the disproportionately large contribution of one person that free and open discussion of policy issues becomes difficult and the NGO becomes ideologically rigid. Such a top-down organizational structure is hardly ideal when trying to work toward historical reconciliation, a goal that requires a willingness to listen to opinions at odds with one's own.

The small size and poor financial condition of all but officially approved or government-supported large scale non-profits has meant that the environment needed to nurture the growth of non-state actors in general – to say nothing of those that can function across borders – has not been present in Japan. Although Korean NGOs have flourished since the transition from military-dominated authoritarian governments to civilian rule in 1993,²³ Japan-South Korea cultural and educational exchanges have been managed almost entirely by government-funded organizations, such as the Japan Korea Cultural Foundation. The absence of grass-roots NGOs is at least in part responsible for the trickle of activity even by TNAs acting in a complementary mode to the government. The much talked about Korea boom in Japan is not the result of the work of TNAs but a government engineered PR campaign begun when NHK, Japan's government affiliated TV network broadcast *Fuyu no sonata* (Winter Sonata), a South Korean soap opera in the spring of 2003. The joint hosting in 2002 of the FIFA World Cup Soccer games was also a government-inspired project, as was the "Year of Japan Korea Citizens Exchanges" in the same year. The schedules of events, for example, of both that year and the Japan Korea Friendship Year in 2005 could be accessed via a website managed directly by the Japanese Foreign Ministry. In other words, Japanese TNA activity in international relations independent of central authority remains limited.

In a similar vein, in spite of heavy government support, the number of sister city links between Japan and South Korea as of present writing stands at a mere 100. By way of contrast, between France and Germany there are approximately 2,400 twinnings of municipalities of various sizes. According to recent figures, Franco-German exchanges managed by labor unions, student groups, or purely local organizations involved 200,000 people in 7,000 separate events – or almost 20 functions per day.²⁴ In 2005, the most recent officially designated "Year of Japan-Korea Friendship" no more than a few hundred events took place in the two countries; one event in February of that year consisted of a visit by Prime Minister Koizumi together with South Korea's ambassador

²³ See Nicola Anne Jones, "Institutional Windows: Assessing the Scope for Civil Society-State Engagement in Democratizing South Korea." http://www.ibrarian.net/navon/paper/Institutional_Windows_Assessing_the_Scope_for_Ci.pdf?paperid=1969508 September 26, 2015

²⁴ Gardner Feldman, p.6.

to the Sapporo Snow Festival, where Japanese soldiers had carved in ice a replica of an eighteenth century Korean fortress. The event called for zero TNA (or even local NGO) participation and consisted primarily of an opportunity for the Japanese prime minister to appear on the NHK evening news to declaim, “Yesterday it snowed but today the sky is clear.”

Within a few days, however, there would be anti-Japanese demonstrations in Seoul to protest the declaration by Shimane Prefecture of Takeshima Day, to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the annexation by Japan of the islands Koreans call Dokto and which South Korea has occupied for more than half a century. The reason for the provocative act by the Shimane prefectural legislature (other than the fact that Takeshima/Dokto had once been part of its territory) had to do with a long-smoldering fisheries dispute. Japanese fishermen have accused South Korea of shutting them out of the rich fishing grounds near the islands. The declaration of Takeshima Day would spark an international incident: jet fighters of the South Korean Air Force would scramble to intercept a business jet belonging to the Asahi newspaper sent up to take photos of the disputed territory – actually two large protruding rocks -- in the Sea of Japan.²⁵

The legally and financially hostile environment for small scale NGOs has had other deleterious consequences for historical reconciliation. Japan today has an unusually small advocacy NGO sector, a rare phenomenon for a country that claims to be a democracy. According to an international survey taken in the 1990s by the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-Profit Research Center, “environment and advocacy” category NGOs accounted for a mere 0.6 percent of total employment for the entire NPO sector. This compared with an average of 2.8 percent in developed countries.²⁶ Since Japan’s largest NGO, the Japan Wild Bird Society (120,000 members) is to be found in the environment category, the same as advocacy NGOs involved in historical justice issues, one can reasonably assume that full time workers in Japan among advocacy groups – such as might be expected to take issue with the government on the plight of “comfort women” – would number perhaps a few dozen at the very most. (In the German case, the environment/advocacy category accounts for 2.5 percent of non-profit sector of employment, a ratio more than four times that for Japan.)

That the passage of the new NPO Law has failed to create a nurturing environment for Japanese civil society can be seen from statistics released by the Prime Minister’s Office in 2000. Of some 26,000 *kôeki hôjin* (public interest foundations) registered in Japan as of that year, about 18,000 had fewer than ten employees and 4,500 were unable to afford a single full time employee. Referring to such figures, Robert Pekkanen observed, “[P]olitical-institutional barriers are higher in Japan than in other

²⁵ It is worth mentioning that Tokyo and Seoul are at odds over the name “Sea of Japan.” The South Korean government is waging an international campaign to convince publishers of maps around the world to remove “Sea of Japan” from maps and replace it with “East Sea” the direct translation of Tonghae, the Korean name of the same body of water.

²⁶ Yamauchi Naoto et al., “Japan,” in Lester K. Salamon et al, *Global Civil Society – Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector*, The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. P. 250

advanced industrialized democracies, preventing the development of independent civil society organizations.”²⁷

A Gresham’s Law of Zealotry

There is reason to believe that past and present legal and fiscal constraints on civil society organizations have combined to discourage ordinary citizens from participating in advocacy and created conditions favoring the rise of small contentious groups, ideologically rigid, staffed by a cadre of committed activists. Japanese advocacy NGOs have consistently acted as competitors to the state on historical issues. The expression “historical reconciliation” (*rekishi wakai*) is virtually unknown in the Japanese advocacy community, whose members generally prefer to use the terms *rekishi mondai*, (“the history question,”) or *rekishi ninshiki* (“historical consciousness.”)

Not surprisingly, the domestic debate on historical issues is shrill, caustic and unforgiving. One example should suffice. In December 2000, the advocacy NGO VAWW convened a “Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery.” While the mock trial definitely qualified as transnational non-state activity, the project cannot be described as being intended to achieve historical reconciliation. Describing the entirely predictable guilty verdicts the tribunal rendered on the defendants, among them the by then deceased Emperor Hirohito, VAWW’s web site stated: “this Judgement bears the names of the survivors who took the stand to tell their stories, and thereby, for four days at least, put wrong on the scaffold and truth on the throne.”²⁸ (Incidentally, at the VAWW mock trial no provisions were made for the accused to be represented by defense.)

By now it should be clear that non-state and state actors concerned with the historical question in Japan – with particular reference to Japan-Korea relations – interact with each other very differently from the patterns prevailing in Europe described by Gardner Feldman. The government-supported non-governmental history textbook commissions,²⁹ which made dialogues on historical issues between Germany and its former adversaries possible, find no genuine counterparts in East Asia. Although Gardner Feldman placed these commissions in the complements pattern of TNA activity, in the case of Japan-South Korea textbook dialogues one would have to define such TNAs as competitors to the government.³⁰

²⁷ Robert Pekkanen, “Molding Japanese Civil Society: State Structured Incentives in the Patterning of Civil Society,” in Frank J. Schwartz and Susan Pharr, *The State and Civil Society in Japan* Cambridge 2003 p. 129

²⁸ VAWW site: <http://www1.jca.apc.org/vaww-net-japan/english/womenstribunal2000/whatstribunal.html> (link no longer active, but entire judgment can be accessed at [http://vawwrrac.org/war_crimes_tribunal September 26](http://vawwrrac.org/war_crimes_tribunal_September_26), 2015.)

²⁹ Jean-Claude Allain, in Horvat and Hielscher, ed. *Sharing the Burden of the Past...* writes: “The make-up of the [French German Textbook] Commission is an important aspect because it contributes to its smooth operation.... None [of the members] have an official mandate from national (or state) governments and they can express themselves on the basis of their personal analysis or conviction with total academic freedom....” 23.

³⁰ Attempts in the 1990s by two groups of Japanese and South Korean educators to emulate history textbook reconciliation along European models failed. The first, initiated in 1990 broke down in 1993.

Some Conclusions and Proposals

Examining European examples of TNA activity is helpful in that we can see clearly that the kind of vibrant, mainstream civil society especially in the advocacy field evident in Europe and supported by non-profit organizations in the United States is virtually absent in Japan. We can also conclude that for various historical and structural reasons state-NGO relations – especially in the advocacy area – are so acrimonious in Japan that it is unrealistic to expect European-style government-TNA relations to develop in Northeast Asia any time in the near future. While the positive effects of government-sponsored reconciliation programs such as officially initiated cultural exchanges, the broadcasting of soap operas on television, joint hosting of sports events, and the promotion of “years of citizens’ exchanges” ought not to be dismissed wholesale, such top-down campaigns fail to address historical issues.

An obvious question for concerned third parties is, if Japan lacks home-grown TNA’s then should Europe and America make available the services of their own TNAs? The answer is yes. The first round of Franco-German textbook talks held in the early 1930s was underwritten by the Carnegie Corporation, which is still engaged in brokering peace throughout the world. Although the original Franco-German talks broke down in 1935, the recommendations made by participants at the final meeting before World War II were accepted in full when talks resumed in 1950. One outcome of Carnegie’s prewar funding of textbook talks was the Georg Eckert Institute for Textbook Research at Braunschweig, a repository of more than half a century of German experience in textbook negotiations with former enemies and victims, which has gone on to undertake reconciliation work in other parts of the world such as the Balkans and the Middle East between Israeli and Palestinian educators. A German political foundation might do well to consider extending invitations to Chinese, Korean and Japanese delegations of educators to tour the facilities and perhaps stay long enough to spend time around a negotiating table.

Another area in which the European experience offers a positive example is in the setting up of foundations whose aim is to turn the sufferings of victims into opportunities for reflection and a renewal of a commitment not to repeat the mistakes of the past. As mentioned above, the agreement in 2001 to compensate victims of Nazi forced labor in former East Bloc countries included the establishment of the German Future Fund. By way of contrast, as mentioned above, the Asian Women’s Fund was dismantled in 2007. What a shame that the process of remembering the sufferings of the *ianfu* cannot be utilized positively to overcome the past by, for example, setting up a joint government-

Fujisawa Hôei, then professor of education at Kanazawa University recalled later the serious shortage of either private or public funding for the project. For information regarding the first Japan-South Korea textbook dialogues, see Fujisawa Hôei “Kôryû to kyôdô no kokoromi” (An attempt at exchange and cooperation) *Sekai*, October, 1998 pp 81-86, and for a report on the second group’s efforts, see “Nikkan no rekishi musunde,” (Linking the histories of Japan and South Korea) in *Asahi Shimbun* August 18, 2001 page 21. More recent collaborative projects between Japanese and South Korean educators have yielded several mutually agreed upon “supplementary educational resources” none of which have received official recognition either by Japanese or South Korean ministries of education.

industry fund in Japan to underwrite the study at Japanese universities by needy but gifted students from Asian countries. Such a project would serve as a permanent act of atonement as well as a commitment to future cooperation. The Chinese and Korean graduates of Japanese universities, funded through such a program could act as bridges between Japan and China, as well as Japan and Korea in future economic and cultural relations.

Youth exchanges are another set of activities where foreign foundations could cooperate with local organizations. An integral part of the reconciliation movement in Europe after World War II was the promotion of youth tourism. The Japanese government is at present in the middle of a campaign to promote inbound tourism, but the goal of the program is limited to improving the bottom line of the domestic tourism industry. With a little extra effort – and outside encouragement -- the Japanese government's "Visit Japan" campaign (*Yōkoso Japan*) could be turned into an opportunity to promote Japan-Korea and Japan-China dialogues in a friendly atmosphere at a very basic level.³¹ Not all examples of tourism as a peace mechanism need come from Europe. South Africa has been a pioneer in the establishment of transnational nature reserves. While there has been talk of turning the Korean DMZ into a peace park, a smaller group has proposed a similar idea for parts of the disputed Southern Kuriles, islands occupied by the Soviet army in 1945 but claimed by Japan.

One of the most successful examples of TNAs working together to overcome racial hatred and forge an alliance that has stood the test of time is the work of US philanthropic organizations in the immediate postwar period in Japan. In three decades after World War II, a group of US foundations – Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford, Mellon and the Asia Foundation – together spent in excess of \$50 million to promote Japanese studies in the US and understanding of America by Japanese.³² The health of the US-Japan relationship today is living testimony to the success of their efforts. For successful examples of reconciliation in Northeast Asia, Japanese leaders – and well-intentioned third parties -- can choose from a long menu of programs and projects undertaken by American foundations in Japan, ranging from the founding of International House in Tokyo (largely by the Rockefellers), free distribution of books to colleges and libraries (The Asia Foundation), funding of area studies (Carnegie), or foreign language teaching (Ford Foundation).

Thinking in a similar vein, it should be remembered that the Nobel Prize committee is one of the earliest examples of non-state transnational work; it rewards those who promote peace and understanding. US and European foundations might wish to encourage Japanese, Korean, and Chinese philanthropists to join forces to create a common East Asian prize that highlights and rewards the activities of home-grown TNAs

³¹ "Political reconciliation went hand in hand with reconciliation among people.... Since the 1950s, every summer millions of students began touring Europe individually, favored by the various programs set up in all countries in order to promote youth tourism." Fernando Mezzetti, "Historical Reconciliation in Italy," in Horvat and Hielscher eds. *Sharing the Burden...* 50.

³² Kim Gould Ashizawa, "The Evolution of Foundation Policies in Japan," in *The Role of Philanthropy in Postwar U.S.-Japan Relations*, JCIE, Tokyo, 2006.

working toward historical reconciliation. Although financial and legal barriers remain for citizens of Northeast Asian states, Europeans and Americans have many resources at their disposal.

Finally, to answer the question posed by the title of this paper, unfortunately there are no easy lessons for Northeast Asian CSOs to draw from the European example. Perhaps the most valuable lesson is that while historical problems have a strong moral-philosophical dimension, often the solutions lie in legal-administrative reforms. People everywhere yearn for peace and understanding but the legal-administrative environment that can enable ordinary people to pour their energies into the resolution of historical issues with their neighbors through grassroots activities may not exist to the same degree everywhere. While the vision of enlightened leaders such as Schumann, Monet, Adenauer, Schmidt, Brandt and others was a crucial element in European reconciliation, idealism alone would not have been enough to achieve seven decades of uninterrupted peace. The credit for that must also go to the many thousands of ordinary people who took advantage of legal-administrative arrangements allowing them to engage enthusiastically in grassroots exchanges as members of TNAs. Since there are many more resources available for foundations and CSOs in Europe and North America, one hopes that at least a few non-profit leaders in Western countries will be inspired to promote reconciliation in Asia not just for the benefit of the region but for all of humanity.

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