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## Japan-Korea Relations: The Stalemate and the Future

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### Abstract

Japan-Korea relations are haunted by Japan's annexation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. But the two sides have put substantial efforts to overcome the past, notably Japan learning from Korean anguish and becoming humble and Korea accepting that humility. But when in 2004 Japan genuinely began respecting and admiring everything that Korea has achieved, Korea found a new era to regain their justice that they failed to establish when Korea was weak. But legal measures that Korea now found to regain justice, on conscripted workers and comfort women in particular, threatens to destroy all achievements the two countries have made so far. This article tries to find a way to save them.

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### Dedication

This essay is dedicated to Ahn Jung-geun, with the quotation of his statement addressed to the President of Legal Department of the Resident-General Office of Japan in Korea on February 17, 1910, three days after he received the death sentence: "Korea and Japan have now parted in such unfortunate circumstances. But some day in the future, Korea, Japan, and China, must create peace and prosperity of North East Asia, hands in hands together. For this, it may be useful to create a joint bank. Youngsters of three countries might create a common regiment to ensure security of the region" (Togo, 2008: 118).

### Introduction

The stalemate between Japan and Korea originates from one factor, Japan's annexation of Korea from 1910 to 1945. More than a decade since I became seriously interested in the relationship between the two countries, I maintained that there were seven "curses (恨 han)" related to the annexation deeply ingrained in Korea unresolved until today.

First, humiliation that Korea, which was the closest to the “civilized land” of Sino-centric order was colonized by a country, Japan, which had been a part of “uncivilized land” within that order.

Second, betrayal that Japan, while “definitively guaranteeing the independence and territorial integrity of the Korean Empire” by the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1904, only in 1910 annexed Korea.

Third, oppression against the righteous army, oppressive military government in the initial stage of annexation, which led to the March the First Movement of 1919.

Fourth, *Kominka*, governance to change Koreans to the citizens of the Japanese Empire, particularly enforced in the 1930’s when Japan was preparing to a total world war.

Fifth, probably the most intolerable curse was that there emerged Koreans who, together with the Japanese, bravely fought and died for the cause of the Empire, of which Korea was a colony.

Sixth, Korea was divided to North and South, when the War ended in 1945. From Korean point of view, if a country needed to be occupied by the U.S. and the Soviet Union separately and a division needed to take place, why was it not Japan?

Seventh, the horror and brutality it had to go through under the Korean War, granted the war was caused by Kim Il-sung (Togo, 2013: 149-152).

Against the backdrop, this essay shows that the 1965 agreements proved to be extremely difficult, but thenceforwards, relations gradually improved culminating to 2004, which to me was a consequence of two sides’ efforts, particularly Japan’s willingness to learn from Korean memory, emotion, and values and Korea’s readiness to accept Japan’s changing postures. However, despite these positive unfolding until 2004, an entirely different conclusion was drawn by the two sides thereafter, and their relations gradually began to disintegrate bringing the current situation at nadir for the first time since 1965. This essay analyzes why these courses of events have taken place, and what are the perspectives for the future.

## **The 1965 Agreements and Their Immediate Impact**

### *Reaching the 1965 Agreements*

Negotiations to establish diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea started immediately after the San Francisco Peace Treaty was signed in September 1951. The Korean government protested that it has the right to receive an invitation because Korea was liberated from the Japanese occupation hence it is a part of victor countries. But John Foster Dulles, American Secretary of State, did not include Korea among the invitees.

But after the conference, with a view to line up both Japan and Korea as vanguards of democratic countries against communist countries, the U.S. began encouraging the two countries to normalize their relationship. The most difficult issue was deeply divided views over Japan’s

annexation of Korea. Korean side categorically maintained that Japan's annexation was "unlawful and unjust" right from the conclusion of the treaty of annexation in 1910. But the Japanese negotiators maintained unwaveringly that annexation, or colonization was neither unlawful nor unjust in accordance of then existing international law, and that fundamental difference simply could not be reconciled.

Political compromise began to be sought out after President Park Chung-hee gained power and made his first trip to Japan in November 1961 and had meeting with Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato. From October to November 1962, Foreign Minister Ohira Masayoshi and Head of Korean Central Intelligence Agency Kim Jong-pil had serious negotiations on the content of Claim and Economic Cooperation Agreement. The framework of \$300 million grant and \$200 million loan with \$300 million of private sector loan began to take shape.

The negotiations got real momentum when in November 1964 Sato Eisaku replaced Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato and together with Foreign Minister Shiina Etsusaburo decided to resolve this issue as the first priority of the new cabinet. Shiina visited Seoul in February 1965 and made a breakthrough agreement on the Basic Relations Treaty that treaties prior to the 1910 Annexation Treaty is "already null and void." Both sides knew that Koreans would interpret it as "from the time it was concluded" and the Japanese side as "from the time the new Basic Treaty is concluded." Thus, on June 22, 1965, together with other unresolved issues, Japan and Korea concluded a series of agreements, which became the final agreements as such, which the two countries could draw together.

There is a saying "Having different dreams in the same bed." In diplomacy, when a full agreement is not possible among the two negotiating partners, this can become a useful approach to overcome differences without really resolving it. The 1965 agreements were precisely such agreement of compromise. Nevertheless, they became the starting point for the two countries to move ahead into the complex Cold War era.

#### *Immediate Aftermath of the 1965 Agreements*

After 20 years of thorny negotiations to establish diplomatic relations there emerged positive fruits of cooperation, but at the same time, there remained continuing strife between the two countries.

As for concrete outcome of cooperation, one cannot but highlight the startling success of POSCO, formerly named Pohang Iron and Steel Company. In the spring of 1964, Park Tae-joon, who was to become the founder of POSCO, under the instruction of President Park Chung-hee was in Tokyo to assist the normalization negotiations. Park Tae-joon had the luck to have met Yasuoka Masahiro, a yangmingism scholar who apparently had strong political influence among Japanese leaders and impressed him with his "steadiness and straightforwardness." Yasuoka introduced him to Inayama Yoshihiro, president of the Yahata Steel, which later became Nippon Steel upon its merger with Fuji Steel. Under Inayama's wholehearted leadership, Yahata Steel transmitted the best of steel-making technology to POSCO. The trust which Park Tae-joon got from Inayama was the cornerstone of this cooperation.

In addition to POSCO's luck of establishing its relations of trust with the Yahata Steel, POSCO had the luck of being supported by Park Chung-hee's government through receiving \$120 million, which consisted of 24% of Claim and Economic Cooperation Agreement finance from the Japanese government (Roh, 2015: 149-150).

On the other hand, political turmoil that enraged from 1973 to 1974 shows well that political relations between the two countries are not easy to be harmonized. On August 8 1973, a renowned politician Kim Dae-jung was abducted from Tokyo and five days later was released in his apartment in Seoul. Kim-Dae-jung was a powerful presidential candidate at the first presidential national election held in April 1971 where President Park Chung-hee won only with a small margin. Japanese police soon discovered that a Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) representative's fingerprints were found at the spot where Kim Dae-jung was abducted, but because of his diplomatic immunity he returned back to Korea. Among media explosive reports on both sides, the two governments came to a mutual understanding through Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil's visit to Tokyo in November 1973 and Foreign Minister Miyazawa Kiichi's visit to Seoul in July 1975 that "involvement of government was not proven."

Just in between these two visits, on August 15, 1974, Mun Se-gwang, a Korean-resident in Japan participated in the Gwangbokjeol national ceremony intending to assassinate President Park Chung-hee but failed and killed his spouse, Mrs. Yuk Young-soo. The fact that Mun used a pistol stolen from a Japanese police office and also, that he was apparently acting under North Korean instruction, enraged Korean public opinion, amplified by media-reporting in both countries. Special envoy Shina Etsusaburo visited Seoul on September 19 and 20, 1974 to barely calm down political anger against Japan.

### **The Rise of Japan-Korea Relations in the Post-Cold War Era**

The primary reason of the end of Cold War was the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Russian Federation, which became the successor state to the Soviet Union governed by President Boris Yeltsin, began moving toward democracy and market economy. The United States became the dominant victor of world politics. Under this new paradigm, each country began navigating through the uncharted ocean of world politics. Japan was no exception.

Unfortunately, Japan was not entirely prepared to adapt to this new situation. When Saddam Hussein of Iraq attacked Kuwait in September 1990, despite the fact that Kuwait was one of the most important oil providers for Japan in the Middle East, Japan reacted very poorly, to the dismay and anger of the United States. It took practically the whole of the 1990's to re-define the nature of the alliance with the United States. In contrast to its U.S. policy, however, successive Japanese prime ministers in the 1990's took active policies toward its neighboring countries in North East Asia, including China, South Korea, North Korea, and Russia to resolve respective unsettled issues. Not all of them proved to be successful but there were a lot of energies trying to achieve political reconciliation with these neighboring countries.

*The Comfort Women Issue with South Korea*

In relations to South Korea, the most important action taken by Japan in the 1990's was related to comfort women. The existence of comfort women sent to the Chinese continent as attachment to the military from the Japanese Empire, i.e., the Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese comfort women from the early 1930's were known in Japan through narratives by soldiers and literary stories.

Despite the deeply ingrained curse against Japan, this issue has never been brought up during 20 years of negotiations for normalizations nor since then for a quarter of century under the Cold War. In August 1991, Ms. Kim Hak-sun made the first coming-out to denounce Japan. On the Korean side, as the society matured from rulers with military background to democratically elected civil presidents, there was the rise of civil-right and gender's right activists. On the Japanese side, several civil-right lawyers and activists such as Aoyagi Atsuko, Takagi Kenichi, Yoshimi Yoshiaki denounced the system as impermissible. President Kim Young-sam took the lead in Korea; whereas Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi who closed the LDP ruling in 1993 and successive prime ministers from non-LDP (from 1993 till 1996) to LDP thereafter all had genuine intention to study what has happened in real and take necessary actions.

In January 1992 Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi made his first visit to Korea, when the comfort women issue became a central point of attention, and since then after series of investigation, on August 4, 1993 his Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yohei issued a statement on comfort women, generally remembered as "Kōno Statement." The essence of the statement was: first, acknowledgement of military's involvement on establishing and controlling comfort station and transporting comfort women to the front; second, recruiting was primarily done by private recruiters, but there were many cases of deception or pressuring against the will of each women; third, life in the comfort station was miserable under coercive situation; fourth, the Japanese government expresses heartfelt remorse and apology to all comfort women who have experienced such pain.

Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi established Asian Women's Fund in 1995 in order to put into action what was implied in the Kōno Statement. It made investigations over all Asian countries and concluded that five countries and areas require actions to apologize: South-Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. Actions differed according to countries, but in general, each identified comfort woman received two million Yen of atonement money from a collective fund created by donation of Japanese people, and around one million yen of medical support from government's budget and an official letter of apology by incumbent prime minister. The Asian Women's Fund closed its activities in 2007, leaving behind a digital museum, first-class primary sources on comfort women issues.

In total 79 Dutch, 285 Korean, Taiwanese, and Philippine women received atonement money, and Indonesians primarily received medical support. With a view to protect privacy, the Japanese government did not make public the country-break down of three Asian countries, but just recently Professor Wada Haruki, who was the leading figure among scholars and activists in Japan supporting Fund's activities, published the break-down: 60 Koreans, 13 Taiwanese, and 211 Philippines (Wada, 2020: 69).

As for the overall activities of the Asian Women's Fund, though not without some difficulties in the implementing stage, former comfort women generally acknowledged Fund's activities, and they became the basis for reconciliation except for one country: South Korea. Why did not South Korea accept Fund's activities?

In the initial stage, both the Korean government and the people in general positively acknowledged Fund's activities. However, this initial reaction by the government, people, and the media waned when an NPO, The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan ("The Korean Council" or "*Chengdaehyop*"), started a powerful campaign against the Fund, arguing that the reparation should have been financed by government budget, and the former comfort women should refuse receiving any offering from the Fund. The Korean Council pressured the Korean government to compensate former comfort women by its own budgetary expenditure.

Nevertheless, after several exchanges between the representatives of the Asian Women's Fund and former comfort women, on January 11, 1997, seven women received everything which the Fund offered with gratitude. The Korean Council mounted harsh criticism against these seven. Not only that the Council insisted that these seven should be excluded from receiving Korean government's compensation, but their rebuke bore the character of *ostracism* from the Korean society. Since then, Korea has never formerly acknowledged Asian Women's Fund activities, except for 60 women who have in reality accepted but could never disclose their identity.

There was some reason why Asian Women's Fund created a private fund. Since Ms. Kim Hak-sun brought this issue to Japanese court the Japanese government accepted moral or humanitarian responsibility just as the Kōno Statement did but did not accept legal responsibility. They feared that mobilizing budgetary money to the atonement itself might weaken their legal position in Japanese court.

But I became strongly distressed to the Council's position to ostracize those who accepted Fund's offer. That approach was the remotest from "victim's first approach." Who among Korean activists have the right to torment former comfort women whose first half of their life was painful enough, by ex-communicating from the society because they have seen and accepted some genuine good will and apology on the part of Japanese government and people? The more I studied this issue the more I became supporter of Kōno Statement, and his spirit of moral humbleness necessary as Japanese. But the self-centered righteousness of the Korean Council, inflicting more pain to the pain which these women had to go through in the past simply distanced me. In retrospect, that might have been the starting point of today's rift on history between Japan and South Korea.

### **Murayama Statement and Obuchi-Kim Declaration**

In contrast to the comfort women issue, Prime Minister Murayama's Statement of 1995 and Obuchi-Kim Joint Declaration of 1998 based on the Murayama Statement were clear steps

forward in narrowing the distance between the two countries. On August 15, 1995, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi issued a statement to mark Japan's capitulation 50 years ago on August 15, 1945. The key passage of that statement reads as follows:

During a certain period in the not-too-distant past, Japan, following a mistaken national policy, advanced along the road to war, only to ensnare the Japanese people in a fateful crisis, and, through its *colonial rule* and *aggression*, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. In the hope that no such mistake [should] be made in the future, I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of *deep remorse* and state my *heartfelt apology*. Allow me also to express my feelings of profound mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, of that history.” (Italics by the author.)

The statement was made as a cabinet decision, a form primarily used to take important political decision. The Murayama Cabinet was a singularly unique cabinet which was composed of a prime minister from the Socialist Party, but all major cabinet members from the LDP. That statement is now generally considered as the clearest statement to have expressed Japan's remorse and apology to its colonialism and aggression. But because this statement was a result of compromise between the (leftist) Socialist Party and the (rightist) conservative LDP, there remained certain vagueness, for instance, no name of any country is mentioned in relations to “colonial rule” or “aggression.”

But since then, for 20 years Japanese foreign policy which necessitated further closure on war-time memory invariably used this statement to express Japan's basic position and filled in the name of the missing country with which it conducted negotiations. Obuchi-Kim Joint Declaration of October 8, 1998 precisely fell into this category. The main part of the key paragraph 2 of this declaration reads as follows:

Looking back on the relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea during this century, Prime Minister Obuchi regarded in a spirit of humility the fact of history that Japan caused, during a certain period in the past, tremendous damage and suffering to the people of the Republic of Korea through its colonial rule and expressed his deep remorse and heartfelt apology for this fact. President Kim accepted with sincerity this statement of Prime Minister Obuchi's recognition of history and expressed his appreciation for it. He also expressed his view that the present calls upon both countries to overcome their unfortunate history and to build a future-oriented relationship based on reconciliation as well as good-neighborly and friendly cooperation. Further, both leaders shared the view that it was important that the peoples of both countries, the young generation in particular deepen their understanding of history and stressed their need to devote much attention and effort to that end.” (Italics by the author.)

In many respects this Joint Declaration constitutes an ideal structure on historical recognition. The Japanese side, which basically stands at a position of perpetrator apologizes first, then based on Japan's apology, the Korean side expresses future oriented direction. The



paragraph ends with an emphasis on the importance of understanding the history, particularly among young generation. Remembrance becomes critical in that deepened understanding.

There is one more important paragraph in this Joint Declaration: Paragraph 10. Towards the end of this paragraph, “President Kim Dae-jung conveyed his policy of opening the Republic of Korea to Japanese culture.” As we all know the actual opening of culture took the direction of opening the Korean cultural wave to Japan. The first and decisive introduction of Korean cultural wave was “Winter Sonata” broadcasted by NHK in 2003 to 2004. Through “Winter Sonata” post-WWII image of Korea reached its peak. But at the time when many Japanese thought that they discovered a new, fascinating and truly respectable Korea, very few Japanese could realize that an entirely different direction started in Korea which could dismantle whole post-war development between the two countries.

2004 in that sense may be placed as the benchmark year in post-war Japan-Korea relations.

### **The Benchmark Year of 2004**

#### *Korea Seen from the Japanese Side*

Korea seen from the narrative of “Winter Sonata” was sparkling. But certainly, it was not just a matter of one single drama in television program. I happened to be lecturing and researching at Princeton University from 2004 to 2006, when “Winter Sonata” created sensation in Japan. The news which I heard from Japan was shockingly surprising. It was Japanese women, more accurately housewives who became so much attracted by the main actor of the program Bae Yong-jun. But through him these housewives discovered and became fascinated by contemporary life and culture of Korea.

Their understanding of modern Korea had nothing to do with historical memory. They just became fascinated by contemporary Korea. So, they began learning the language, started travelling there, and joining special “Winter Sonata tours.” I was slightly concerned that their knowledge of Korea was totally separated from annexation and historical memory, but at the same time, I felt that an entirely different world is now opening, because it is precisely these housewives who are virtually responsible for education of their children. How can children of future Japan have negative feelings toward Korea if they are brought up by mothers who have such a positive feeling to Korea?

In fact, Japan-Korea relations following the Obuchi period to Koizumi period, where cultural exchanges occupied an important part, including the co-hosting of FIFA world soccer, looked like very promising. In contrast, Japan’s efforts to overcome the past in relations to other neighboring countries seemed to be heading to a stalemate in every corner.

On China, Japan’s policy of “not isolating China” after the Tiananmen Square Incident was reciprocated by China’s wooing of Emperor’s visit in 1992. But at a time when Murayama issued his decisive statement of apology and remorse in 1995, patriotic education under Jiang

Zemin was reenergized. The relationship was entering into a crisis in 2001 with Koizumi's declared visit to Yasukuni.

On Russia, when the Russian Federation succeeded the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, the initial year of 1992 looked very promising. But Japan was too rigid in seizing that opportunity. Despite Hashimoto-Yeltsin's joint efforts in 1997-98 and the Mori-Putin efforts in 2000-2001 negotiations practically froze after Koizumi got to power in 2001.

On North Korea, Kanemaru Shin's visit to North Korea and his meeting with Kim Il-sung in 1990 was a swift move at the wake of the end of the Cold War but with no avail. Instead, Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in October 2002 produced a startling success but almost instantaneously lost its vigor because of the handling of abduction issue.

Admittedly on the U.S., after the difficult 1990's in redefining the alliance, Koizumi began substantially improving relations with GW Bush, particularly after 9/11 of 2001. But until that aspect became the dominant stream of Japanese foreign policy of the 2000's, the only country which produced tangible positive outcome in the post-Cold War era looked like to be Korea.

But most importantly Korea was genuinely sparkling in its entirety. First, on democracy: Lee Sun-man, anti-communist and anti-Japan autocratic leader became South-Korea's first leader after it was liberated from Japan. Then three military leaders succeeded: Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Roh Tae-woo. That was followed by electoral presidential system, with five-year one-term presidential system. At each point of critical change, such as demonstration to overthrow Rhee Syngman (1960), assassination of President Park Chung-hee (1979), Gwangju Uprising under President Chun Doo-hwan (1980), June 29 Declaration towards Democracy (1987) by Roh Tae-woo, impeachment of President Park Geun-hye (2017), streets demonstration often led by students, who literally gave their life, set the future course of their democracy.

Second, on economic development, the energy toward creating democracy went side-by-side to devote nations' power towards economic development. Gigantic companies such as POSCO, Samsung, Hyundai, SK group, LG group enlarged their share in the global market. In 1996 South-Korea became a member of the OECD next to Japan from Asia. In 1997 it has successfully overcome the Asian financial crisis.

Third, on international politics: in 2000 President Kim Dae-jung, after careful networking with key countries in the region including Japan, travelled to Pyongyang to hold the first summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il. South-Korea's international standing rose, and many European countries recognized North-Korea after this summit.

Last but not least, on cultural power: *Winter Sonata* was the first success to let the world recognize the power of the Korean Wave. But that was the starting point. By now Korean dramas and films on TV and Netflix, ranging from historical dramas and North-South relations to various narratives of contemporary Korean life, began to take over the East Asian cultural scenery. Such K-pop bands as KARA and BTS are seizing the hearts of global followers.

Success in usual circumstances engenders confidence. Confidence engenders tolerance. 2005 marked 60 years of Korean independence and 40 years of normalization with Japan. This author genuinely entertained a hope, a small but tangible hope that finally after long years of mutual efforts to bring our relations closer, we reached to an apex of post-war relations. Finally, we might be able to embark to a new relationship of deeper mutual understanding, mutual respect and greater cooperation. Such was my expectation.

As it turned out to be, I now realize that it was a great illusion. In Korea at the time when I was entertaining that hope, precisely juxtaposing moves began to take place. Very few Japanese realized the severity of that move.

### *Japan Seen from the Korean Side*

Very belatedly I came to realize what happened in South Korea in 2004 when I read the full text of The Supreme Court Verdict as of October 30, 2018 against the Nippon Steel. There is a section within “1.5” entitled “additional measures by Korea” and the gist of first two paragraphs could be translated as follows:

(1) On March 5, 2004, Korea established a new law entitled “Special Law related to the Investigation of the Truth concerning the damage caused by the coerced mobilization by the Japanese Empire” (heretofore “Truth Investigation Law”). Based on this Law and related Ordinances, investigations were fully implemented to clarify the damage caused by the coerced mobilization.

(2) Around January 2005, Korea disclosed a part of the documents related to the negotiations on Claim and Economic Cooperation Agreement. Then a “Civil and Government Committee concerning the measures to be taken by the disclosure of negotiations between Korea and Japan” was formed. On August 26, 2005 that Committee expressed its official view that “Claim and Economic Cooperation Agreement is not an agreement to settle colonial reparation by Japan. It is an agreement to resolve financial, civil and debt relations between Korea and Japan based on Article 4 of the San Francisco Treaty. Unlawful activities against humanity in which Japan’s state power, namely its government or military was involved cannot be seen as being resolved by the Claim and Economic Cooperation Agreement. Japanese governments’ legal responsibility lies in such issues as comfort women, Koreans remaining in Sakhalin, Koreans suffering from atomic bombs.”

To sum up, in accordance with the “Truth Investigation Law” and the “Civil and Government Committee” investigations, four issues have remained as legally unresolved: comfort women, Koreans remaining in Sakhalin, Koreans suffering from atomic bombs and “conscripted workers (徴用工).”

As for the first three issues, the Japanese government has acted with sincerity and energy to resolve the situation. But it is important to note that all actions by the Japanese government was taken based on humanitarian consideration, and it is not based on the acknowledgement of illegality and injustice of colonial rules. On these three issues Korean side basically did not

refuse to accept Japanese measures based on humanitarian consideration. As already seen on comfort women issue, some Korean activists objected to the position taken by the Japanese government, but others, including substantial numbers of comfort women, accepted Japanese proposal.

But ironically the “conscripted workers’ issue” stood at an entirely different space than other three issues. The three issues were not subjected in negotiations for 1965 agreements. But “conscripted workers” issue has clearly been negotiated during these negotiations as we see below in Paragraph 4 and 5. Under this situation, some of leading Korean lawyers apparently noted that the best way to settle this issue is to find out a legal argument to let the Japanese companies pay the debt.

This is the origin and cause of “conscripted workers’ issue” first taken up in 2012 in the small chamber and in 2018 in the large chamber of the Korean Supreme Court.

### **Centripetal and Centrifugal Relations between Japan and Korea from 2005 to 2017**

#### *Centrifugal Power Relations*

Chronologically at least the following six cases need to be mentioned:

(1) March 2005: Shimane Prefecture established the “Takeshima (Dokto) Day”

A new fishery agreement was signed between Japan and Korea on November 28, 1998. But the compromise which would allow Shimane fishermen to catch at the vicinity of Takeshima could not become functional. To quench the dissatisfied fishermen, on March 22, 2005, the prefectural parliament made February 22 as the day of Takeshima (Dokto). Enraged President Roh Moo-hyon declared “diplomatic war against Japan.”

(2) March 2007: Abe reportedly made a statement that comfort women were not coerced

On March 11, 2007 Abe said to journalists that there was no proof that physical coercion was used at the time of recruitment of comfort women. It was widely reported in the liberal American press as “Abe the denier.” Abe quickly explained that he was not a denier, but for the first time American House in full session adopted a resolution requesting Japan to make an official apology.

(3) August 2011: The Korean Constitutional Court pronounced the Korean government guilty

On August 30, 2011 Korean Constitutional Court pronounced the Korean government to be guilty because it has not protected enough the right of comfort women. In December President Lee Myung-bak consulted this issue with Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko of Democratic Party. Noda’s apparent “cold shoulder’s approach” angered President Lee.

(4) May 2012: The Supreme Court pronounced guilty on the conscripted workers’ case

On May 24 Supreme Court Small Chamber pronounced Nippon Steel Corporation guilty on the conscripted workers' case. The logic behind this judgement was clear and simple, that "Unlawful activities against humanity in which Japan's state power, namely its government or military was involved cannot be seen as being resolved by the Claim Agreement." But this verdict is simply incompatible with the position taken by the Korean government in 1965. The Korean government, by way of accepting the formula "already null and void." in the Basic Relations Treaty, knew that the government of Japan does not accept responsibility as colonizing power nor reparation obligation. Nevertheless, they agreed that all claims, explicitly including claims from former conscripted workers, are settled "completely and fully." And now the supreme court suddenly gave a verdict that former conscripted workers have the right to re-claim those claims from which their government had withdrawn in order to achieve a compromised solution. I still cannot forget the profound sense of despair when I read the gist of this verdict in media report then.

(5) August 2012: President Lee Myung-bak landed Takeshima (Dokto)

President Lee's landing on Takeshima on August 10 was the first landing done by a Korean President. Reportedly it was his rage against Prime Minister Noda in December 2011 for his "cold shoulder's approach" taken in relations to the Korean Constitutional Court verdict on comfort women. But Lee's image seen on Takeshima from the television screen, as well as his statement made after the landing concerning a hypothetical visit by the Japanese Emperor requiring "an apology which penetrates to the heart of Korean people" enraged many Japanese. For the first time in history, Japanese were more enraged than Koreans on Takeshima issue.

(6) November 2015: Park Yu-ha was indicted as criminal case

On November 18, 2015 Professor Park Yu-ha of Sejong University was criminally indicted on account of the publication of her book "Comfort Women of the Empire" published in Korean (2013) and in Japanese (2014). By then she was already a well-known scholar publishing many books on Japan-Korea relations. "The Comfort Women of the Empire" represented serious efforts trying to see the issue from wider perspectives based on mountains of hearings done by the Korean Council. This credible effort not only being appreciated but also becoming an object of criminal indictment was a profound shock for supporters of Japan-Korea relations in Japan.

*Centripetal Power Relations*

(1) August 2010: Prime Minister Kan's Statement

On August 10, 2010 Prime Minister Kan Naoto of Democratic Party issued his statement on Japan-Korea relations. The first two paragraphs read as follows:

This year marks a significant juncture for the Japan-Republic of Korea relationship. In August precisely one hundred years ago, the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was concluded, making the beginning of the colonial rule of thirty-six years. As demonstrated by strong resistance such as the Samil independence movement, the Korean people of

that time was deprived of their country and culture, and their ethnic pride was deeply scarred by *the colonial rule which was imposed against their will* under the political and military circumstances. I would like to face history with sincerity. I would like to have courage to squarely confront the facts of history and humility to accept them, as well as to be honest to reflect upon the errors of our own. Those who render pain tend to forget it while those who suffered cannot forget it easily. To the tremendous damage and sufferings that this colonial rule caused, I express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and my heartfelt apology.” (Italics by the author.)

Prime Minister Kan reaffirmed major points of remorse and apology embodied in the Murayama Statement. In addition, his expression “colonial rule which was imposed against their will” was a clearer expression, acknowledging the injustice of colonial ruling. At the same time, Kan government was careful not to interfere to the area of legality.

Thus, overall response of the Japanese media was not entirely negative. Among six major newspapers, *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, and *Chunichi* supported his willingness to further acknowledge the injustice of colonial ruling; *Sankei* criticized sharply that he went too far; and *Yomiuri* and *Nikkei* took a position somewhere in between, warning not to go too far on apology but appreciating that he was careful on Japan’s legal position.

## (2) August 2015: Prime Minister Abe’s Statement

On August 14, 2015, Prime Minister Abe, based on a Cabinet decision, made his Statement marking 70 years since the end of World War II. Since I have been a strong supporter of the Murayama Statement of 1995, I was waiting for Abe’s Statement with great concern, whether he would basically preserve Murayama’s direction or not. I heard the Statement with great relieve, because not only that he basically supported Murayama’s line, but he also said something beyond our expectation. Two paragraphs are clearly worth mentioning.

Incident, aggression, war -- we shall never again resort to any form of the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. We shall abandon colonial rule forever (abr.). With deep repentance for the war, Japan made that pledge. (abr.) Japan has repeatedly expressed the feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology for its actions during the war. (abr.) we have engraved in our hearts the histories of suffering of the people in Asia as our neighbors: those in Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, and Taiwan, the Republic of Korea, and China, among others; (abr.) Such position articulated by the previous cabinets will remain unshakable into the future. (Italics by the author.)

This is the essence of paragraphs which inherit the position taken by the Murayama Statement. Although all key words seemed to be aligned here, I acknowledge that the key logic of “remorse and apology to the colonial rule” is expressed somewhat vaguely. But rather than rebuking the Statement for its missing part, I consider more important to fill in the gap by actions of the Japanese people. In fact, the next paragraph introduced herewith shows exactly that direction:

In Japan, the postwar generations now exceed eighty per cent of its population. We must not let our children, grandchildren, and even further generations to come, who have nothing to do with that war, be predestined to apologize.

Still, even so, we Japanese, across generations, must squarely face the history of the past. We have the responsibility to inherit the past, in all humbleness, and pass it on to the future.” (Italics by the author.)

This paragraph is such powerful reminder of President Weizsacker’s well known speech made on May 8, 1985 at West Germany’s parliament in commemorating forty years of Germany’s capitulation.

The first half of this paragraph conveys exactly the same theme mentioned in Weizsacker’s speech that “Guilt is, like innocence, not collective, but personal.” But the second half of Abe’s speech, astonishingly, conveys exactly another part of Weizsacker’s critically important thinking: “All of us must accept the past. We are all affected by the consequences and liable for it. There can be no reconciliation without remembrance” (Weizsacker, 2009: 10-12).

It is unfortunate that particularly the second half of Abe’s Statement is hardly known not only abroad but also inside Japan. I consider that it is the obligation of all people of Japan, the future generation, at least to remember what has happened in the past, and as Abe’s speech mentions, this matter is not a matter which a prime minister only is responsible, but a matter which people of Japan has to consider as their own issue.

### (3) December 2015: Agreement on Comfort Women

In December 2012 immediately after Abe assumed power, some of liberal American media began warning that Abe might reverse the line established by the Kōno Statement. Faced with strong voices of concern, Abe, together with Suga, Chief Cabinet Secretary, soon stated at the parliamentary hearing that “We have no intention to revise Kōno Statement now.” (Togo 2013: 173-178).

But after Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013, conservative voices asking the revision of Kōno Statement became louder. American government was alarmed and in March Abe had to state that “his cabinet has no intention to revise it.” Furthermore, in March, Obama arranged a meeting of Obama-Park-Abe in the Hague. That meeting paved the way for Obama’s visit to Japan and Korea in April.

But Abe was not wasting time to carefully examine the Kōno Statement. On June 20, 2014, the government published a detail survey about “the process of Japan-Korea negotiations on the comfort women issue.” But that survey concluded that a) Kōno Statement was not based on proved evidence of the usage of physical coercion at the recruitment; b) there was no trace that Korean government has not done anything beyond normal function in diplomacy; and c) Kōno Yohei himself confirmed that he had no objection about the content of that report. The survey resulted in an unexpected situation in Tokyo that political forces against the Kōno Statement suddenly seemed to have waned (Togo, 2015: 154-158).

At the same time, sometimes around June 2014, The Korean Council and its Japanese counterpart organization “National Action for the Resolution of Comfort Women (referred to “National Action”) began having much more serious talks than before. The Korean Council apparently began hinting that they might reconsider legalistic approach which they had always followed.

Against these backgrounds, in February 2015, Abe agreed to hold confidential talks on comfort women between two countries’ top diplomats. This finally led to Abe-Park bilateral summit in November, and ultimately to foreign ministerial agreement on December 28 (Wada: 75-84).

The most important points of agreement were that a) Japanese Foreign Minister introduced Abe’s words, practically confirming what Kōno stated in 1993; b) the Japanese government agreed to pay, from the budget, an amount of one billion Yen to a healing fund to be established by the Korean side.

## **Total Collapsing in 2018**

### *Comfort Women*

Wada Haruki describes that negotiations were proceeding, and positions of four participants, namely Korean Foreign Ministry and the Korean Council, and Japanese Foreign Ministry and the National Action were becoming closer, but finally without reaching a complete agreement, on December 28 agreement was finalized between the two Foreign Ministers (Wada, 2020: 78-80).

And yet Wada gives quite a high evaluation to this agreement as follows: “One has to recognize that the 2015 agreement was the result of 30 years movement that tried to resolve the comfort women problem. The content of agreement, apologies based on the recognition of government responsibility, budgetary expenditure which signifies apology, are clearly steps forward compare to what had been achieved thus far. The declaration by the Japanese National Action and the report formulated by the Presidential Task Force both recognize these steps forward. Actions were taken by the “Reconciliation and Healing Fund” based on 1 billion Yen from the Japanese government. 36 out of 48 of comfort women still alive accepted 100 million Won each for healing.” (Wada, 2020: 143-145).

Regrettably what was achieved by 2015 agreement became unsustainable. President Park Geun-hye was impeached in March 2017 because of Choi Soon-sil Gate and Moon Jae-in was nominated President on May 10. In his telephone talks with Prime Minister Abe on May 11, President Moon stated that “Majority of the Korean people are psychologically not in a situation of accepting the agreement on comfort women” but did not ask renegotiations. He set up a Presidential Task Force at the Foreign Ministry, and that Task Force drew a conclusion on December 28 2017 that “there was positive and negative in the agreement but victim first approach was lacking.” (Wada, 2020: 88-89)



By the end of 2017, the Korean Council took a position to invalidate the 2015 agreement and pressured the government to take necessary measures for that. On July 11, 2018 the Council was renamed as “Righteous Remembrance Union.” On November 21, 2018, under their strong pressure the Korean government declared dissolving the Healing Fund. Wada Haruki commented that “Nothing was mentioned concerning the reason of Fund’s dissolution, state of its activities, accounting report on the remainder of one billion Yen. As an official decision by the government, it was totally irresponsible, and gave extremely negative impression to the Japanese people.” (Wada, 2020: 91, 140).

### *Conscripted Workers*

I already explained that the Supreme Court Small Chamber’s logic in May 2012 was that “Unlawful activities against humanity in which Japan’s state power, namely its government or military was involved cannot be seen as being resolved by the Claim Agreement.” For sure they were not resolved because the Korean government when concluding the 1965 agreements decided to withdraw from claiming them, in order to achieve a compromised solution which gave them greater national interests than insisting that the Japanese government should acknowledge injustice and unlawfulness of its colonial ruling. Fair enough, if the Koreans, now that it became wealthier and stronger consider that this treaty does not stand anymore, they might tell this to the Japanese and propose the conclusion of a new treaty, on a more justifiable basis. The issue of colonialism is an area clearly understudied in the global academism; Japan and Korea might take the lead of such study. But any change that might take place should be done based on mutual agreement, not based on unilateral abrogation of the past treaty. Slight hope that the Supreme Court Grand Chamber’s verdict might overturn the verdict of Small Chamber was dashed, when the Grand Chamber gave the final guilty verdict to Nippon Steel Corporation on October 30, 2018 and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries on November 29, 2018.

I might like to verify the set of documents concluded in 1965 on this issue to verify my logic displayed above.

First, in the Article 2 of the Basic Relations Treaty “all treaties or agreements concluded between the Empire of Japan and Empire of Korea on or before August 22, 1910 are already null and void.”

Second, in the Claim and Economic Cooperation agreement, the grant and loan to be paid by the Japanese government is fixed in Article I. Then Article II-1 prescribes that “[the] problem concerning property, rights and interests (abr.) and claims between the Contracting Parties and their nationals, including those provided for in Article IV, paragraph (a) of the San Francisco Peace Treaty is settled completely and finally.

Third, the Agreed Minutes concerning Article II has an important clause (g) which prescribes that “the claims between the two countries and their nationals, which is settled completely and finally as mentioned in paragraph 1, include any claim falling within the scope of the "Outline of the Claims of the Republic of Korea against Japan" (the so-called "Eight Items"), (abr.) and that, therefore, no contention can be made with respect to the above mentioned Outline of the Claims of the Republic of Korea against Japan”

Fourth, in *the fifth item* of the Eight Items, it is written “un-obtained payment, payment for guarantee and other payment requests of Korean conscripted workers.” Korean Supreme Court verdict concludes that “Anywhere within the Eight Items can we find items which presupposes unlawfulness of Japanese colonialism, therefore the above-mentioned *fifth item* do not presuppose Japanese unlawful actions. Therefore, one cannot consider that above-mentioned “un-obtained payment, payment for guarantee and other payment requests of Korean conscripted workers” includes right of reparation against coerced mobilization done against Korean workers.” (italics by the author)

From the logic of Japanese negotiators, it goes without saying that any traces which presuppose unlawfulness of Japan’s colonization could not appear in the agreement, simply because Japanese negotiators did everything to eradicate such traces. The legal contentions of the two sides completely differ each other.

### **Crumbling Down from 2019 to the Beginning of 2021**

#### *From January to Summer 2019*

Having received this double punching on comfort women and on conscripted workers, Abe’s government began expressing its deep dissatisfaction against Korea. On conscripted workers, Abe proposed, according to the Claim and Economic Cooperation Agreement, to enter into diplomatic consultation, and if it does not succeed, to enter to arbitration as the Agreement presupposes. President Moon did not agree.

The last-minute proposal made by Moon to Abe just before the Osaka G20 Summit (June 28 to June 29) was remote from attracting attention of the Japanese side. In Osaka Abe took an unusual measure for Japanese diplomacy. That was to refuse a dialogue with President Moon. Not only that they did not have any formal bilateral talks, but also any touch-base talks apparently did not take place during multilateral meetings.

But immediately after the G20 Osaka Summit, Abe took an offensive measure to counter Korean attacks. The Japanese government declared to strengthen export-control on three chemical materials to produce semiconductor in Korea starting from July 4. On August 1, the Japanese government excluded Korea from the list of “white countries” which receive preferential treatment on export control.

The Japanese side explained that these export control measures were implemented because of security concern that South Korea has not taken enough strict measures on their own export reportedly to North Korea. But South Korea was enraged arguing that export-control measures are just retaliation to President Moon, who just let Korean Supreme Court verdicts on conscripted workers, taking place. Thus, by July 24 Korean government filed Japan’s export-control measures to WTO and on August 12 took Japan out from Korean white countries’ list. Furthermore, public opinion was enraged and moves in Korea of boycotting Japanese products or cancelling trips to Japan soared.

Now Korea retaliated. On August 22 Korea gave official warning to abrogate GSOMIA, an information exchange agreement to ensure effective intelligence communications on North Korea.

*From Autumn 2019 to Summer 2020*

But from autumn 2019, Korean side backed away and began taking fewer offensive measures. First on November 22, on the eve of the day when GSOMIA would have abrogated, Korean Presidential Office declared that “on the understanding that we would be able to revive the notice of abrogation any time, we now suspend the effectiveness of prior abrogation notice.” On the same day, the Presidential Office also declared that “while dialogue on export control is continuing between the two administrations, Korea suspends its filing of Japan’s export control measures to WTO.”

Second, on November 26, Korean media reported that President of National Assembly, Moon Hee-sang formulated a bill to create a “memory-human right foundation” based on Korean and Japanese voluntary contributions to compensate 1,500 former conscripted workers. There were immediate reports that the plaintiff of the lawsuits does not agree to this idea, but nonetheless on December 18, Moon Hee-sang presented his bill to the National Assembly.

Third, in these slightly warmer political atmospherics, on December 24, 2019, under the auspices of Japan-China-Korea summit held at Chengdu in China, Prime Minister Abe and President Moon held a bilateral meeting.

Fourth, then from the beginning of 2000, the whole world was overthrown into the Covid19 pandemic. Both for Japan and Korea, the highest priority issue became respective fight against Covid19. It was as if a political lull took place between the two countries. Despite several cluster explosions, Korea became known as one of the most successful countries to fight against Covid19. Japan’s records were not that disastrous but lagged behind Korea. Korean success could have been an opportunity to bring the two countries closer. But unfortunately, that did not take place.

Fifth, that temporal lull seems to have closed quietly in the summer of 2020. On June 18, Korean government reopened its filing to WTO on Japan’s export control. On August 4, an important procedure was accomplished concerning the Supreme Court Trial on conscripted workers directed against Nippon Steel. Since Korean Court could not transmit to Nippon Steel the confiscation order of its stock asset, it put that order to public notice. The anticipated period of that public notice was completed on August 4. Nippon Steel’s stock asset would be sold by auction after all preparations being accomplished. General anticipation is that this could happen in the first half of 2021.

*From Summer 2020 to the Beginning of 2021*

In this situation of mounting tension, totally unexpected political changes took place in Japan. Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, after his seven years and eight months tenure suddenly resigned because of the trouble of his stomach. Suga Yoshihide, who supported Abe throughout these seven years and eight months as Chief Cabinet Secretary succeeded Abe on September 16.

On September 24, the first Suga-Moon web-meeting took place. In the first half of the meeting, Suga said that “Korea is an extremely important neighbor country” and Moon said “Japan is the closest friend with whom we share fundamental values and strategic interests.” But when they talked on conscripted workers, reportedly, Suga asked Moon to trigger a new policy to bring back healthy relations, and Moon said that “the positions differ each other.”

On October 27, Suga made his first parliamentary policy speech. He referred to Korea at the end of bilateral relations and stated that “Korea is an extremely important neighboring country. In order to bring back healthy relations, based on our coherent policy, we urge Korea to take appropriate measures.”

Reading these public statements, there is no way to find out whether Suga is willing to “find a way” to halt further deterioration of the relationship. As I have repeatedly stated in this paper, I cannot support the logic of Korean Supreme Court judgement on confiscated workers. Furthermore, if these judgements are put into force as scheduled now and would result in causing real damage to the accused companies, it would entail retaliatory measures by the Japanese government, and then in turn, another round of retaliatory measures by the Korean government.

I do not think that this never-ending vicious cycle serves national interests of Japan or Korea. Thus, from the end of 2020 to the beginning of 2021, there was mounting anxiety on both sides, at least among some well-wishers of bilateral relationship, hoping to realize a more normal relationship.

But at the beginning of 2021, new shocking events took place on comfort women. After the dissolution of Healing Fund in November 2018, the Korean Council, now renamed as Righteous Remembrance Union, was in turmoil. In April 2020, Yoon Mee-hyung, a leading activist of that Union was elected to the parliament from the ruling party. But on May 7, Lee Yong-so, a long-time activist and her colleague from the days of Korean Council publicly denounced her.

At the time when the impression of helplessness and distrust was spreading among many Japanese people, the Japanese government was sued in Korean court, the first case by a group of comfort women and the second case by the Righteous Remembrance Union. The Japanese government totally rejected this accusation based on sovereign immunity. But on January 8, 2021 Seoul District Courts gave a guilty verdict to the Japan on the first case. The Japanese government vehemently rejected this verdict. The second verdict which was scheduled for January 13 was postponed until March.

Against this dead-locked situation, on January 18, 2021, a slight move was taken by President Moon. In responding to questions by press, President Moon publicly stated several points that he has never mentioned before. On conscripted workers, he said that “I do not consider desirable that the verdicts will be subjected to enforced implementation through selling of companies’ assets.” On comfort women, he stated that “I was a little perplexed that a new issue of (state) guilty verdict was added on many existing difficulties” and that “the Korean government recognizes that the 2015 agreement was a formal agreement between the two governments.”

On the same day, January 18, 2021, Prime Minister Suga made a parliamentary policy speech to open a new session. Unfortunately, nothing changed from his previous speech on October 27, 2020. Is there any way out from this vicious cycle?

### **Geopolitics and History**

Thus, at the time of writing of this paper, the two countries are still in stalemate on the two issues of conscripted workers and comfort women. The curse among Koreans is profound and persistent. Memory, emotion and values, even sense of power is intermixed in this stalemate. In concluding this paper, the only remaining point of view that this author can provide is to enlarge the scope for consideration.

First from the point of view of geopolitics, I consider that the two countries would have so much to gain from having trustworthy relations. From Japan's point of view, the single most important issue probably in the coming decades is to keep alliance with the U.S. strong and effective, but at the same time, have also stable and sustainable relations with its giant neighbor, China. This is certainly not an easy task. But in order to ensure the realization of this objective, Japan's diplomatic standing would become higher to have trustworthy relations with key countries within the geopolitical sphere of North East Asia. There are only two countries which have real importance now, Korea and Russia. North-Korea is another important country, but at the time of writing of this paper it has too much of distance to consider "trustworthy relations"

This author is not in a position to preach Korean readers about who should be their trustworthy partner, but does not Korea have a stake in having strong and good ties with China as well as with the U.S.? In such circumstances, would trustworthy relations with Japan not give a stronger basis to conduct a powerful diplomacy?

Second, there is the problem of long-time history between Japan and Korean peninsula. At times there have been tense periods between the two countries, but if you look back carefully, in general Japan and Korea have maintained peaceful relations, and even after very tense periods, managed to overcome these tense periods amazingly fast.

Contacts and exchanges began peacefully between the Korean Peninsula under Goguryo and Japan under Wa. Then Korea became divided by Goguryo, Silla and Baekje, and Japan being united by Yamato. These contacts eventually developed to tensions between Silla allied with Tang of China and Baekje allied with Yamato of Japan. On 663 Silla-Tang defeated Baekje-Yamato at the battle of Baekgang, called Hakusukinoe in Japan. As the result of this defeat Baekje withdrew to Yamato, and they became an integral part of Japanese society, particularly in Southern part of Japan.

Thence onwards, for about a millennium, Korea and Japan had peaceful relations. They were broken by Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion to Korea, Imjin War from 1592 to 1598, terminated by his death. As early as in 1600 a war broke out between pro-Toyotomi warlords and those who opposed it. Tokugawa Ieyasu, who led those war-lords not following Toyotomi legacy

won this war and swiftly established in 1603 his own dynasty in Edo (present-day Tokyo) called Bakufu, with his own title of Shogun.

Soon after becoming the first Shogun, he transferred that position to his son, and set up his residence at Sumpu (present-day Shizuoka). As early as 1607, the newly established Tokugawa Bakufu revived the tradition of receiving the Joseon Mission and this 1607 mission practically fulfilled the role of establishing diplomatic peace between Japan and Korea. That peace lasted for 260 years during the whole Edo period until the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

The last and third interruption of peace was Japan's annexation of Korea from 1910 to 1945, about which I do not need to describe in this paper. But one thing is certain. More than 75 years after Japan's defeat and Korea gaining independence, the two countries are not able to come to terms with 36 years of Japan's annexation. More precisely when the relationship seems to have achieved so many positives in 2004, precisely thence onwards, the relationship now seems to have started disintegrating. Is there not some wisdom to learn from history, notably from the integration of Baekje in the Japanese society after the battle of Baekgang of 663, and the 1607 reconstruction of peace after the Imjin War of 1592-1598?

## **Conclusion**

Is there any way out to save Japan-Korea relations from this vicious cycle? In my view, though the feasibility may be very low, it is not entirely impossible. Five points need to be mentioned.

First, I think it is critically important that both governments take a public position that resolution of these two issues is desirable for the national interests of both countries. In that respect, Suga is well advised to catch this opportunity when Moon took a reconciliatory gesture.

Second, on conscripted workers, it is critically important to note that this tribunal is between private citizens. The plaintiff is former Korean conscripted workers. The accused is Japanese companies, such as Nippon Steel or Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. Therefore, if reconciliation is achieved between the plaintiff and accused, then legally the case will be resolved. Reconciliation can be made, if a new structure such as a Fund or Foundation, which would satisfy both the plaintiff workers and the accused companies, can be established.

Third, comfort women's trial against the government of Japan which inevitably brings out the issue of sovereign immunity entails a huge number of complexities. But I think that there may be small keys to find a solution, such as the fact that 36 women out of 48 comfort women accepted the offering by the Healing Fund, and that Moon just acknowledged the 2015 agreement as formal government agreement. The key, likewise, the conscripted workers' issue, will be reconciliation. But there is a need to find a way for reconciliation between comfort women themselves and the Japanese state.

Fourth, President Biden was inaugurated on January 20, 2021 despite all political turmoil in the American domestic politics. China would become his number-one foreign-security

issue, particularly in East Asia. Cooperation based on trust between Japan and Korea is likely to become his priority issue. Both Suga and Moon needs to respond to his policy.

Fifth, as I described above, if one takes a broad view of Japan-Korea relations from strategic and historical perspectives, sometimes I wonder, why the two countries, public opinions, and respective leadership cannot take a broad view as well to revitalize the fruits and power of mutual respect and cooperation.

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