JAPAN'S POLITICAL APOLOGIES AND THE RIGHT TO HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-20th century, when international war crimes tribunals established the precedent that an individual — or a group — acting on behalf of a nation could be found guilty for state-sponsored atrocities, victims of such violence have desired official apologies as a partial form of redress for the wrongs committed against them. Even so, it was not axiomatic that such apologies would become the integral part of human rights discourse that they are today. In large part, victims and their supporters have pitched themselves against their own and/or foreign governments to bring about state apologies, making official apology not simply a worthy goal, but now something considered by many as a human right. When a government apologizes in some form, victims and their supporters count it as a real achievement. Such apologies, therefore, fuel an ongoing commitment for more, and official statements of "sorrow and regret" for past atrocities have become indispensable components in legitimating human rights issues in national history.

The 1990's was in many respects a decade of international apology politics. Around the world, an outpouring of national remorse for historical atrocities came to shape the language of politics in Germany and Argentina, the United States, South Africa, and Japan. There is even a "Sorry Day" in Australia to draw attention to the country's past treatment of its aboriginal people. It has become increasingly clear, however, that presidents and prime ministers address historical atrocities in order to reinforce their own present claims to legitimacy. Relying on standard expressions of "sorrow and regret" for the past, world leaders describe historical events in future-oriented words that work around the content of the histories at stake. Moreover, as they apologize for wrongs considered abnormal to the international community's current collective sense of self — racial extermination, slavery, apartheid — they inscribe new histories for the

pasts in question. As Middle East scholar Ilan Pappe has observed, such approaches to the past can so rework the content of the historic events involved that they "eliminate" the past from history.[1]

Official apologies most often refer to events that have been muted within the larger sweep of a nation's history — the incarceration of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War, for example, before President George H. W. Bush signed the U.S. government's apology. Yet they do not refer specifically to victims' individual histories, let alone their dignity.[2] Once a national leader makes such an apology, societies can incorporate the victims' past into broader, collective, forward-moving narratives, ultimately reconfiguring the same sort of progressive tale that existed before the victims' voices were heard. In anthropologist Richard Wilson's provocative phrasing, victims can, thus, lose the "human right to a human history" as the story is taken out of their hands.[3] In the early 21st-century climate of political apology and redress, therefore, the individual stories that make up the histories of past atrocities in the first place stand precariously close to extinction as the state's narrators already rework such histories for their own purposes of national narration.

The whole issue of apology is rife with contradiction. For some victims, no apology will ever suffice. Yet, as demands for state-level apologies escalated in the late 20th century, many people around the world demanded apologies for the historical atrocities they survived — from former U.S. soldiers suffering the effects of Agent Orange to former sex slaves of the Japanese

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[1]Ilan Pappe, "Historiophobia or the Enslavement of History: The Role of the 1948 Ethnic Cleansing in the Contemporary Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process," in Max Paul Friedman and Padraic Kenney, eds., *Partisan Histories: The Past in Contemporary Global Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2005): 127-143.

[2]See Brian A. Weiner, *Sins of the Parents: The Politics of National Apologies in the United States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

[3]Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 57.

empire.[4] Once official statements of regret are uttered, however, many victims and their supporters may describe them as fake or lacking in real meaning, raising the problem of who should decide when an apology is real. Moreover, because official apology is part of international law, the statements often come with cash compensation or reparations, leading others to say that victims are simply in it for the money. Of course, only the privileged members of a society — not necessarily economically privileged, but those privileged by race or gender or ethnicity as well — can find venues to say such things publicly. The ongoing debate concerning apologies and reparations to African-Americans for slavery in the United States makes this abundantly clear as even mentioning the issue encourages some politicians to say things that would get many others fired from their jobs.[5]

Examining apologies from the victims' perspective — as well as from that of their descendants — reveals many of a given society's present anxieties over coming to terms with its past and also allows for more of the victim's voice to be heard.[6] At the same time, it is as vital to observe how governments use statements of "sorrow and regret" for their own purposes because the writing of history itself is in a tense moment as a result of this political phenomenon. Official apologies move so easily in and out of long-standing practices of apologetic history that *not* taking a stand as a historian on certain issues — the Rape of Nanjing, for example — can wind up now aligning the historian with the state in complicating the victim's right to his or her own history.

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[4]For a useful compendium, see Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: Norton, 2000).

[5]See Roy L. Brooks, *Atonement and Forgiveness: A New Model for Black Reparations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[6]Norma Field has written eloquently on the subject of apology from the victims' perspective. See her "War and Apology: Japan, Asia, the Fiftieth, and After," *Positions, East Asia Cultures Critique;* Special Issue**:** *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War, and Sex*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1997): 5.

This uncomfortable tension comes into relief perhaps nowhere more clearly than in East Asia during the late 20th century, where long-quiet voices burst seemingly out of nowhere in the wake of wartime emperor Hirohito's death 1989 and demanded public recognition for their long denied histories.[7] Widely known examples include the former sex slaves of the Japanese military, as well as other laborers and soldiers forcibly enslaved or conscripted from throughout Japan's colonies.

The apparent "newness" of these stories in Japanese society during the 1990's points to a signal difference with the post-1945 history of victims' claims and movements for redress in Germany. Although it has been intelligently argued that too much has been made of Hitler's personal culpability in German historiography, in Japan, the leader of the wartime state — Hirohito — remained on the throne, generating the opposite condition. Japan's postwar was, in effect, framed between defeat to the Allies and the U.S. government's decision at the time *not* to try the emperor as a war criminal and the emperor's death in 1989, an unusual situation that spawned what remains known as the "chrysanthemum taboo."[8] The chrysanthemum is the symbol of the emperor, and this "taboo" is commonly understood as the inability of Japan's public sphere to assess the role of the emperor and the imperial institution's responsibility for the Japanese empire (1895-1945), Japan's war (1931-1945), and the suffering therein.[9] With

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[7]A useful volume in English is T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia Pacific War(s)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

[8]For general discussion, see Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).

[9]In English, see Norma Field, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor: Japan at Century's End* (New York: Vintage, 1992). Such "taboos" are certainly not unique to Japan. Turkish novelist, Orhan Pamuk is on trial now in Istanbul for the Turkish "taboo" of speaking out about the Armenian genocide. See Pamuk's essay in *The New Yorker* (19 December 2005). Interestingly, Pamuk mentions discussing such "taboos" with Japanese Nobel prize winning novelist, Kenzaburo Oe: "I heard that (Oe), too, had been attacked by nationalist extremists after stating that the ugly crimes committed by his country's armies during the invasions of Korea and China should be openly discussed in Tokyo" (34).

Hirohito's death, however, the official silence could officially be broken, touching off a public airing of the state's historical victims' narratives and placing the now strangely irreconcilable issue of Hirohito's responsibility for such suffering at the center of the debate.

Moreover — and not wholly discrete from the silenced conditions in post-1945 Japan proper — many of the areas in Asia that Japan colonized during the first half of the 20th century did not begin to foster the conditions necessary for victims' groups to make public claims until the mid-1980's or later (North Korea and Myanmar remain wholly undemocratized in this regard to this day). Thus, the coincidence that Hirohito died just as Japan's former colonies offered new liberties to their own people — not to mention that elsewhere in the world the Cold War was declared over — sparked the wildfire of victims' stories heard and published in the 1990's. Moreover and not insignificantly, despite the time lag in many instances, victims were still alive to make the claims themselves.

Thus, for the past 15 years, the Japanese government's response to victims of its Asia-Pacific empire and war has made the transnational practice of national apology a centerpiece of regional and national politics.[10] There are tens — if not hundreds — of thousands of websites throughout Asia (very much including Japan) and North America that track and assess Japan's official statements of redress, and, by current estimate, there have been nearly 20 official statements of "regret" and "heartfelt apology" for the past.[11] Such political practices now dovetail with subfields of modern history to the extent that "war responsibility studies" is becoming a commonplace discipline in its own right, and mainstream bookstores devote whole

[10]Shinichi Arai and Toshiya Iko compiled a compendium of claims in *Sekai* (World), No. 696, December 2001: 178-196. In addition, Aiko Utsumi discusses this trend in her conclusion to the 1999 reissue of *Sengo Hosho to wa Nanika* [What Is Postwar Compensation?] (Tokyo: Asahi Bunko, 1999 [1994]): 195-205.

[11]See, for example, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_war_apology_statements_issued_by_Japan>. Recognizing the significance of this public sphere, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs established its own site in multiple languages. See: <www.mofa.go.jp>.

sections to this category.[12] Journals specialize in the issue, and the controversy has generated a discourse so familiar that catch phrases stand in place of entire discussions.[13] Even the most cautious observers define Japan's "textbook problem" — meaning the issue of what events from the empire and war are included in Japan's government-approved school books — as one of the most volatile issues in regional diplomacy, and apology for the past remains *the* crucial topic in intra-regional affairs.[14]

Notably, as Japan's so-called miracle economy collapsed and was restructured during this same time, leaders debated Japan's national interests anew in light of the country's aspirations to be a "normal state" in the international system, which many in Tokyo today define as a nation with a permanent U.N. Security Council seat and a forward military. Japan's apologies to its former colonies and wartime adversaries in Asia have come to blend into such concerns, revealing their importance in Japan's national interests conundrum. Put simply, leaders have decided that it is in Japan's national interests to apologize in some measure because doing so affirms Japan's present ties with its Asian neighbors.[15]

Whether or not the practice of official apology will continue with such saliency, of course, remains to be seen. In August 2005, commemorating the 60th anniversary of Japan's

[12]Left-leaning booksellers such as Tokyo's Ajia Bunko were the first to create separate sections, but mainstream stores such as Kinokuniya have followed suit.

[13]Under Shinichi Arai's direction, the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility publishes the quarterly journal *Senso Sekinin Kenkyu* [The Report on Japan's War Responsibility] and, in early 2002, Iwanami publishers reissued Saburo Ienaga's 1985 benchmark analysis, *Senso Sekinin* [War Responsibility].

[14]The Research Institute for Peace and Security in Tokyo, for example, pointed to "the history problem" as a major sticking point in regional co-operation. See Heiwa/Anzen Hosho Kenkyujo (The Research Institute for Peace and Security), eds., *Ajia no Anzen Hosho 2001-02* [Asian Security Policy 2001-02] (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 2001): 7-39, 212-13.

[15]For a well-written version supporting this approach, see Yoichi Funabashi, "Kako Kokufuku Seisaku o Teisho Suru" ["A Proposal for a Policy to Overcome the Past"] *Sekai* (World), No. 692 (2001): 48-62, esp. 50-51.

defeat, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi issued yet another official apology for Japan's past. Pundits noted right away that Koizumi used an international setting to give new weight to this apology — an aid forum in Jakarta rather than a setting within Japan. Yet many also observed that Koizumi did not exceed the parameters inscribed in 1995 by then Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama on the country's 50th anniversary of defeat.[16] Quoting the Murayama declaration almost verbatim, Koizumi declared:

> In the past, Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression, caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. Sincerely facing these facts of history, I once again express my feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology, and also express the feelings of mourning for all victims, both at home and abroad, in the war. I am determined not to allow the lessons of that horrible war to erode, and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the world without ever again waging a war.[17]

The voices demanding apology and compensation continue to find these words woefully inadequate, if not disingenuous, underscoring the divide between the state's formula and what sufferers and their supporters believe constitutes a real apology for their individually lived histories. The problem, however, becomes even more difficult to unravel as we examine its complex hold on the region.

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[16] See coverage in *The China Daily* <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/22/content_436701.htm>.

[17] Official translation quoted from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website under the "Historical Issues" link.

CHAPTER 1

JAPAN AND KOREA

The 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and South Korea was Japan's first settlement with one of its former colonies after the 1951 American-orchestrated San Francisco Peace Treaty, and relations between the two countries bring into stark relief both governments' determination not to let actual events of the past undermine national interests of the present. Furthermore, initial decisions that both sides' leaders made about the colonial era reveal how the South Korean government has worked within Japan's boundaries of apology politics since their inception, compounding Korean victims' difficulties in attaining the "human right to a human history" of their individual suffering.

Japan's problems with apology are not unique to its relations with Korea, and it would be misplaced to argue that one Asian-Pacific country's movement for redress from Japan is more important than another's. Japan's post-colonial relations with Korea afford, however, an unusually rich history for demonstrating the state's determination not to let the problems of the past undermine the present. In no other aspect of Japan's foreign relations have the political techniques of apology been so well developed.

In June 1965, after 13 years of protracted negotiations, Japanese and South Korean diplomats normalized relations. This treaty was Japan's first state-level, post-Peace Treaty settlement in Asia to address Japan's colonial era. On the eve of normalization, Japanese officials made statements that shed light on Japan's practice of apologetic politics writ large. [18] At

[18]For documents concerning Japan-South Korea normalization, see United Nations, *Treaty Series: Treaties and International Agreements Registered or Filed and Recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations*, Vol. 583 (New York: United Nations Publications, 1966). For a compelling discussion of Japan's formula for redress in Southeast Asia, see Sayuri Shimizu, *Creating a People of Plenty: The United States and Japan's Economic Alternatives, 1950-1960* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), especially Chapter 4.

present, the expression "unhappy past" has frozen into an oblique signifier for describing Japan's colonial period in Korea (1905-1945). When South Korean President Chun Doo Hwan visited Japan in 1984, Emperor Hirohito for the first time publicly stated his personal "regret" over the "unhappy past" the countries shared.[19] Labels such as these for the colonial era have a special ability to not name anything, which rightly angers those seeking recognition of specific histories. Such labels, however, can be traced back to the negotiations leading to the 1965 treaty: it was, in fact, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer who encouraged the insertion of this apologetic formula into Japanese-Korean negotiations.

Reischauer felt strongly that the Japanese government should address Korean resentment over colonization, and recently declassified Johnson administration papers reveal his personal involvement in Japan's statements.[20] At heart, Reischauer espoused the then-prevailing pragmatic view of the U.S. administration that normalization was urgently needed. Robert Komer, of the National Security Council Staff, succinctly explained why in a memo to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy:

> Top priority in NE Asia today is *ROK/Jap settlement.* This could mean so much more in the way of long-term U.S. dollar savings than a troop cut that there's no comparison. We're still spending over *$300 million* a year on 20 million ROKs, with really no end in sight. So we've got to find someone to share the long-term burden, and it's logically the Japs. Settlement would pump $.6 to 1 billion of public and private funds into ROK, with more later.[21]

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[19]6 September 1984, Reception at the Imperial Palace, Tokyo, quoted in Arai and Iko: 188.

[20]Karen L. Gatz, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968: Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), "U.S. Efforts to Encourage Normalization of Relations Between the Republic of Korea and Japan": 745-802.

[21]In Gatz, No. 342, Komer to Bundy, 19 May 1964: 760 (italics in original). With U.S. expenditures in Vietnam escalating, this view rapidly gained momentum.

Despite Tokyo's reluctance, Reischauer held firm to his position that Japan should make an official statement about the past. In September 1964, he wrote a memo to Secretary of State Dean Rusk acknowledging that "clear Japanese apology for their colonial oppression of Korea in past" was difficult because "Japanese officials and public simply do not feel they owe any apology to Koreans."[22] In November, he sent a telegram to Rusk to report on his private breakfast meeting with Foreign Minister Etsusaburo Shiina during which he urged Japan to make "some sort of apology to Koreans for colonial past." When Shiina's secretary suggested that the Foreign Minister's upcoming visit to Korea would come "as close to expression of apology as was feasible," Reischauer responded favorably, yet added that, "some sort of forward-looking statement about turning backs on past unhappy history… might assuage Koreans' feelings without irritating Japanese public."[23]

Early the following winter, in February 1965, Shiina visited Seoul for several days. Socialists in Japan protested the Liberal Democrats' decision to normalize relations with South Korea alone by organizing a no-confidence vote in the Diet, and students in both Tokyo and Seoul held mass demonstrations protesting the move to exclude North Korea from the settlement. Japanese Prime Minister Eisaku Sato and South Korean President Park Chung Hee, however, were determined to make Shiina's visit a success at all costs. When Japan's foreign minister arrived at Seoul's Kimpo Airport, he immediately declared Japan's "regret" for "the unhappy period" the countries shared.[24] Shiina told waiting reporters: "I believe that both countries should reflect deeply on the truly regrettable circumstances of the unhappy period in

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[22]In Gatz, No. 349, Reischauer to Rusk, 8 September 1964: 770.

[23]In Gatz, No. 353, Reischauer to Rusk, 21 November 1964: 778.

[24]*Asahi Shimbun*, 17 February 1965 evening edition: 1.

the midst of our nations' long history… It is in the hopes of both countries that we establish future-facing permanent and friendly relations on which we can build a new respectful and prosperous history." The countries had not yet established diplomatic relations, and this moment marked the first Japanese official public statement in Korea — South or North — about the colonial era. *Asahi* newspaper special correspondent, Hiroshi Imazu, noted Shiina's statement as highly significant, and he conveyed his own hopes for improvement in his article quoting Shiina.[25] At the same time, James C. Thomson, Jr., of Lyndon B. Johnson's National Security Council Staff, condescendingly remarked that "Shiina came as close as a Japanese can to apologizing for Japan's sins, and everyone — including State — is thoroughly pleased."[26]

In pragmatic terms, Reischauer's apologetic notion of "unhappy history" neatly froze the past into an indeterminate time period for which no one was to blame, the perfect solution for a national interests approach to an uncomfortable past. And yet, the callousness of such a formulation is clear: Democratic states that rely on such "future-facing" rhetoric humiliate survivors of atrocity — whether their own nationals or foreigners — by saying, in effect: "That was then, this is now, you don't matter to our future, and therefore your past must be swallowed for the benefit of our present." The state does not necessarily deny the past, but victims are left with no option for protest; they run along a Möbius strip of the state's creation in courts that ultimately remain indifferent to their claims.[27]

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[25]*Asahi*, 17 February 1965 evening edition: 1.

[26]In Gatz, No. 357, Thomson to McGeorge Bundy, 20 February 1965: 84.

[27]Masanori Okuda, "Sengo Hosho Saiban no Doko to Rippoteki Kaiketsu," (Movements in Postwar Compensation Decisions and Their Legal Interpretations) in Chi Myon Gwan, Masahiro Igarashi, et al., *Nikkan no Sogo Rikai to Sengo Hosho* [New Japan-Korea Partnership and Postwar Compensation] (Tokyo: Nihon Hyoronsha, 2002): 131-146. See, in particular, the useful chronological chart of claims against Japan from 1990 to the present: 147-159.

It is worth noting, moreover, that Japan's records of its policymaking process at this time are unusually difficult to obtain. When the U.S. State Department's Office of the Historian recently published its own records of U.S. foreign relations during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, it acknowledged an uncommon editorial decision in the preface to its planned-for two-volume Korea/Japan series.

> The most substantive declassification problem arose not among documents selected for publication on Korea, but for those selected for Japan. It was (our) unanimous view… that given the number and significance of documents selected for publication in the Japan compilation that must still remain classified, the Japan part of the volume did not constitute a "thorough and accurate, and reliable documentary record of major United States foreign policy decisions."… Part 2 of this volume on Japan will not be printed until it meets these standards.[28]

The documents "must still remain classified" because the Japanese Foreign Ministry will not agree to their public release. The U.S. State Department's Office of the Historian is appealing the Japanese government's decision, yet acknowledges that, "We win some of those appeals and some we lose… It can take many years to settle."[29]

Japan's refusal to participate in the timely declassification of documents is not the only occasion when the international community has tolerated the perspective of Japanese officials with regard to how many such officials and their apologists view their nation's former colonies. Ironically, however, in 1965, the Japanese government actually wanted publicity for its negotiations with Korea and encouraged the major Japanese newspapers to report on the foreign minister's trip to Seoul as well as the talks later that year in Tokyo. As former *Asahi* correspondent Imazu made clear to me in a conversation several years ago, journalists at the time

[28]William Slany, State Department Historian, in Gatz: ix.

[29]E-mail communication with the author, 12 June 2002.

had access to Japanese officials in ways that young reporters only dream about today.[30] Imazu's full-page article "Four Days in Seoul" stands as a rare piece of reportage that blends private and public insights into a vivid and informed history of the event.[31] Imazu believed that both governments negotiated in good faith, yet he also paid particular attention to student protests as well as to police efforts to prevent protestors' access to the diplomats. Imazu underscored that the South Korean people were by no means in unanimous accord with their government's decision to resume relations with Japan.

Imazu drew attention to the problem that lay ahead for Koreans who sought state-level redress from Japan. Noting that his Korean counterpart at the *Donga Ilbo* emphasized a student banner that read, "Stop New Colonialism!!" Imazu observed: "The reality of colonial rule in the past is enough by itself to make [Koreans'] unease quickly turn to fear, which, in turn, becomes conviction. If we [Japanese] are really in earnest about bringing our two countries closer together, then we have to look beyond money and goods and think about 'problems of the heart.' This above all was what I learned during my brief stay in Seoul."[32] Imazu's commentary foreshadowed how the official formula of "regret" for "unhappy history" might allow Japanese to think that the problem was solved. While some Koreans — businessmen and some government officials — would profit directly from normalized relations, others would later discover the gap between formula and meaning to be unbearably great.

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[30]Interview with Hiroshi Imazu, Tokyo 11 June 2002.

[31]Imazu, "Soru no Yokkakan," ["Four Days in Seoul"] *Asahi Shimbun* 21 February 1965: 12. For more discussion, see Imazu, *Jyanaristo Sono Yasashisa to Tsuyosa: Kingendaishi e no Arata na Tabidachi* [A Journalist's Strength and Kindness: A New Journey into Modern History] (Tokyo: 3A Network, 1998) 186-196; also, Imazu, "Kimpo Kuko ni Kieta Kimigayo: Shiina Gaisho, Hokan no Asa," [Canceling *Kimigayo* at Kimpo Airport: The Morning of Foreign Minister Shiina's Arrival in South Korea] in *Nihon Kisha Kurabu Kaiho* (Reports from the Japanese Journalists' Club), No. 377 (2001): 8-9.

[32]*Asahi Shimbun*, 21 February 1965. Imazu noted that many Koreans distrusted Japan's intentions because the national income of Korea was 1/10th of Japan's, and the technical and industrial levels were so far apart.

How, then, did Reischauer and Shiina's 1965 terms shape Japan's politics of apology? Both as a diplomat and more famously as a historian, Edwin O. Reischauer's belief in the unbounded benefits of modernity led him to encourage a future-oriented approach to the past. The discourse of "sorrow and regret" emerged as the most powerful apologetic technique in play. Japanese leaders finally solidified their "future-facing" stance in these terms during the 1990's, when similar political apologies flourished worldwide. Repeatedly during the intervening decades, Japanese and South Korean diplomats and politicians made statements that "regretfully" dissolved "the past" into indeterminate declarations concerning the nations' future together. Surely even the most basic psychoanalysis would describe this as denial.

Reischauer's involvement demonstrated U.S. pressure regarding this particular Japanese policy, yet both Japan and South Korea have subsequently chosen to maneuver within the boundaries of this formula. As a result, Japan's official apologetic techniques have, until now, helped define South Korea as the internationally recognized government on the Korean peninsula.[33] This circumstance, of course, did not exist during the era of "unhappy history" when there were no separate countries, only "Korea." The 1965 Normalization Treaty between Japan and South Korea identified the latter as the "lawful Government" on the Korean peninsula. Notably, until September 2002's historic head-of-state meeting between Tokyo and Pyongyang, Japan's official proclamations of "regret" for the "unhappy past" referred solely to South and not North Korea, thus quietly hardening South Korea's privileged position into stone. The international community further exacerbated this selectivity, referring to "Japanese-Korean relations," on the one hand, and "Japanese-North Korean" ones on the other. In short, only the South has existed in Japan's apologetic imagination for the past several decades. Given the

[33]During the preparation for the most recent normalization talks in August 2002, North Korea's demands for "apology" and "compensation" emerged as a chief obstacle. See *Asahi Shimbun*, 26 August 2002.

importance of that relationship, the substance of any future normalization between Japan and North Korea will likely maintain the national interests involved in that hierarchy, benefiting Tokyo first (as did normalization with the South in 1965), then Seoul, and then, finally, Pyongyang.

Simply put, the "future-facing" nature of Japanese-South Korean relations has polarized rather than expanded perspectives of the past. The intensity of claims against Japan in the 1990's only further entrenched this polarization, as the officials involved worked within the parameters of the existing discourse. In October 1998, more than 30 years after Shiina's statements at Kimpo Airport, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi issued Japan's first *written* declaration of "regret" for "the past" to South Korean President Kim Dae-jung.[34] There were no active verbs in the groundbreaking "joint declaration" that heralded a "new partnership" between the countries. When national interests are at stake, state leaders side-step grammatical constructions that might require someone to take responsibility for history. The heads of state subsequently celebrated the six-month anniversary of their declaration in March 1999 with an unusual live television broadcast. Because no journalist raised the dreaded issue of the past, neither did Obuchi or Kim. Instead, both men spoke of the dawn of a "new history," prodding business and military leaders to forge ahead under the rubric of "cultural sharing," an expression that eerily evoked the policies of the 1920's. [35]

Since 1965, the South Korean government's acquiescence to Japan's apologetic practices has weakened its own citizens' demands that Japan recognize their histories. As was evident in

[34]See coverage in *Asahi Shimbun*, October 1998; *Chosun Ilbo,* October 1998; *New York Times* October 1998. The full text of the October 1998 partnership declaration is in Arai and Iko: 195.

[35]Michael Robinson has written extensively on Japan's initial era of "cultural sharing" with Korea during colonial rule. See Robinson, "Broadcasting, Cultural Hegemony, and Colonial Modernity in Korea, 1924-1945," in Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999): 52-69.

his "new partnership" declaration (1998), even South Korea's most internationally recognized advocate of free expression, former president Kim Dae-jung, relied on the frozen forms of international apology. When South Korea's current and likewise activist President Roh Moo-hyun made his inaugural trip to Tokyo in June 2003, it seemed only a matter of course that he, too, agreed to "face the future" with both the prime minister and emperor of Japan.[36]

Kim's participation in the politics of apology with Japan reveals the grip such practices hold on international relations, and suggests that a critical rethinking of these forms is necessary. In a 1998 interview, Kim told Atsushi Okamoto, editor of the Japanese opinion journal *Sekai*, that, although the Japanese government was responsible for compensating survivors of Japan's sexual slavery, he would refrain from lodging a protest at the United Nations on the surviving women's behalf. "Although Japan's 'comfort women' policy was indeed horrendous," Kim remarked, "what Germany did to Jews was even worse. The German people, however, have recognized this fact and educate their children accordingly."[37]

Kim pointed to the critical need for a long-term commitment in the form of social education. In doing so, he followed the contours of the widely supported "Japan should be more like Germany" approach. Yet, by choosing the safe course of invoking Germany as the model apologizer, Kim eschewed the opportunity that only a head of state attains in apology politics. He was the only one who could meaningfully challenge the official terms of "the past." Ultimately, Kim's explanation devalued the horror that the Korean women endured. He respected the status quo in agreeing to Japan's "regret for the past," and suggested that Japan's state-sponsored atrocities were not as bad as Germany's. Kim stayed within the parameters of official apologetic

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[36]See *Hankyoreh* and *Asahi Shimbun*, 7 June 2003.

[37]Kim Dae-jung and Atsushi Okamoto, "Kokuminteki Koryu to Yuko no Jidai o," ["Towards a More Citizen-Oriented Pattern of Exchange"] in *Sekai*, No. 653 (1998): 61.

technique as he described the suffering of Korean victims as less than that of the victims of a more familiar state-sponsored atrocity — the German death camps. In this way, Kim weakened his own citizens' claims to regain their dignity in public before they die.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM WITH APOLOGY

It is of vital importance to the apology problem today to understand that, since 1945, Japan and Korea's respective stances on the question of Japan's colonization of Korea have been, at times, at the core of national self-definition. To differing degrees, the official Japanese response maintains that the colonization was legitimate and that Japan simply did what the other imperialist nations of the world did at the time. Today, this line of argument mostly perpetuates the "authorized" view of the 20th century, which continues to present Japan as a victim of the times without examining what actually happened during Japan's brutal occupation of Korea, or elsewhere in Asia.[38] Conversely, and almost without exception, the official Korean position is that the colonization was illegitimate. This position at first necessitates belief in a widespread, armed resistance in Korea to Japanese colonization that cannot be empirically substantiated to the degree imagined. [39] It is made more confused by the fact that two governments that remain officially at war today — South and North Korea — are speaking in unison on an issue that arguably contributed to the civil war that divided them. Declaring illegitimate Japan's past colonization of the Korean peninsula, of course, has also long sidetracked the sticky problem of particular Koreans benefiting from Japanese rule.

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[38]For elaboration, see my book, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

[39]There was armed resistance to the Japanese between about 1906 and 1911 in the form of the "*Üibyöng*" (Righteous Army); yet, by most estimates these troops never numbered more than 12,000-15,000 at the most. The imaginary place they hold in South Korean society, however, is indicative of the desire Koreans have now to believe that their countrymen fought valiantly to protect the nation from the Japanese at the time, despite the well-known treacherous dealings of those who sold out. Kim Hyün-sök's recent film, *The YMCA Baseball Team* (2002) goes so far as to create a secret band of national heroes fighting to save Korea at the time of Japan's protectorate agreement (1905). Notably, this film was released during the year that Japan and South Korea shared soccer's World Cup (2002) and uses sports as its organizing theme.

Interestingly, however, South Koreans arrived at the beginning of this century making claims about history against the Japanese government, while also beginning to assess how their own government further muddled the matter in 1965 by sidetracking individual Korean claims. Younger Koreans — like their counterparts in China and elsewhere in Japan's former imperialized terrain — are responsible now for disentangling their own national histories from the politics of blame. Knowing about such obstacles in South Korea, however, has not lessened the determination that former victims have in their pursuit of redress from Japan. In a word, they want to know before they die that their individual histories matter, that their victimization is part of Japanese history. For them, the problem remains that, despite the political posturing, because the governments involved claim to have settled the matter with the 1965 treaty, the state no longer necessarily denies the past, but victims are left with no option for protest but to pursue their cases in state courts that ultimately remain impervious to their claims.[40]

Focusing any critical lens on South Korea at all over the apology issue, however, might seem to some like blaming the victim for the crime. And, indeed, Japan's official response to ongoing demands from victims for an apology remains much more troubling for the simple reason that the Japanese state bears responsibility for orchestrating the violence in the first place. Also, as Japan remains the richest nation in the region — and still with the second-largest economy in the world — its government holds the trump card in dealing with the governments of those seeking apology.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's statements to Korea throughout 2005 — the 60th anniversary year of the end of the war, as well as the 40th anniversary of normalized relations with the south, and the 100th anniversary of the Portsmouth Treaty ending the Russo-Japanese

[40]See Okuda.

War that “gave” Korea to Japan as a colonial war prize in the first place — that the countries must “not let history be an obstacle” but “resolve to face the future together” are frustrating at best. Political scientist Susan Pharr suggested even that the whole practice of apology might be considered a “disastrous policy failure” since no one seems to believe the terms used anyway.[41]

In short, by parroting the terms that have been in play for at least four decades, Koizumi’s words, at their core, further blocked the possibility for the elderly victims of the Japanese state’s historic crimes to claim their human right to a human history. Whether or not Edwin Reischauer’s belief that Japanese did “not feel they owed any apology to Koreans” rang true in 1965 across Japanese society is no longer the point because the issue is about living history: its concerns are immediate as the remaining survivors will all be dead soon. If apology as public policy is ever supposed to accord dignity to those who suffered, this simple fact should matter.

Although Japan has practiced apology politics according to an internationally resonant formula of atonement for much of the postwar era, the lived histories of the victims of Japan’s wars of imperialist expansion remain undervalued as an ethical concern in contemporary Japanese society. Victims and their supporters will, therefore, continue to seek more from Japan in terms of an apology that addresses their specific history.[42] Like other nations around the world, the degree to which Japan has engaged in apologetic politics has depended on its leaders’ aspirations to power in the international community. Therefore, at this stage, unless something as unlikely as international economic sanctions on Japan for how it practices apology politics

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[41]Susan Pharr, Comments at Harvard University, November 2005.

[42]An example includes Asia University history professor Shudo Higashinakano’s piece in the September 2003 issue of the opinion journal, *Seiron,* in which he argues that the Nanjing massacre could not have occurred because Japanese soldiers were too busy burying their own dead and getting haircuts. For comment, see <www.japantoday.com> 31 August 2003.

occurs, there is no reason to think that Japan will change its policies. The state and its supporters can assume they have displayed sufficient contrition, and the victims will all be dead soon.[43]

In the wake of Hirohito's death in 1989, the explosive public debate within Japan over the issue of responsibility for the state's role in directing the colossal suffering of Asians earlier in the 20th century made it clear that many Japanese felt strongly that Japan did, in fact, owe an apology to the nation's historical victims, and that such redress was at the crux of Japan's new hoped-for international role. At the beginning of the 21st century, though, in the wake of so many repetitive official sorrowful statements of "heartfelt apology" and "remorse," a new challenge is confronting those who hope to have their individual histories matter to Japan's collective modern narrative. During the past decade, extremists in Japan as well as some of a more centrist inclination have found increasing public space to claim that Japan has apologized enough already.[44]

When Japan's historical victims such as the former comfort women have refused Tokyo's statements in recent years and have continued their demands for what they call a "real" apology — or, looked at differently, an apology they consider meaningful — their critics have begun complaining that Japan has apologized many times, and, therefore, the victims are certainly just after the money. The state's narrators now discuss the victims' history openly, yet no one has to

[43]Shortly after the war in Afghanistan began, President Bush asked Congress to drop a provision in a spending bill that encouraged former U.S. prisoners of war to sue Japanese companies for forced labor during World War II. Congress removed the provision to avoid undermining relations with Japan, which it wanted squarely on board in its war preparations. Kyodo News Service On-line, 30 November 2001. Then again, in January 2003, on the eve of war in Iraq, a U.S. appeals court in San Francisco barred veterans' claims as "unconstitutional." *The New York Times* On-line, 21 January 2003.

[44]For example, Yoshinori Kobayashi and Susumu Nishibe, *Hanbei to Iu Saho* [A Handbook for Anti-Americanism, or, Anti-American Etiquette] (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 2003); Yoshihisa Komori, *Gaikô Hôkai* [Failing Japanese Diplomacy] (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 2004. The right's ability to argue distorted truths — and lies— in apparently rational logic dovetails with Gavan McCormack's notice of the Japanese right's co-option of the term "liberal" for its own purposes. See McCormack, "The Japanese Movement to 'Correct' History," in Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000): 53-73.

take responsibility for their history, let alone the victims' current dignity, or lack thereof. In this respect, the state is made stronger from without and within because it has displayed an amount of remorse accepted by the international formula of normality, yet has not fundamentally had to redefine itself. For the time being, the state's protagonists have apologized in the state's national interests. Society again casts off the victims, while their detractors re-empower the old national narrative that existed before the victims' voices were heard. Prideful zealots denounce those who speak out on victims' behalf — Japanese, Asians and others alike — as espousing what they call a masochistic view of Japanese history, a charge that Japan's leaders are either failing to challenge or encourage themselves.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the term “apology” itself in its current usage in Japan brings to light an interesting parallel between it and the state’s co-option of the term “human rights,” and a brief example will serve by way of a conclusion. In short, like human rights, apology can now be spun in completely the opposite direction from how those seeking its inclusion in public discourse originally intended. No longer does the word mean solely an apology to the Asian victims of Japanese imperialism as it did a decade ago. It means now — or, perhaps it means again as it once may have done in the immediate postwar period — official repentance to Japanese nationals who suffered fighting for the state’s cause.[45] NYU historian Marilyn Young has demonstrated how such a double valence operates with regard to the concept of human rights: “In one (way), the language of human rights (can now be) used to defend the reputations of those who may have committed atrocities; in the other, attention to one past violation of human rights has led to the uncovering and discussion of tangentially related cases.”[46] While many have come to expect the latter situation as far as apology in Japan is concerned — for example, the former enslaved laborers’ cause emboldened the comfort women and so forth — the notion of the Japanese government apologizing to those who may have facilitated some of the atrocities is no longer beyond the pale.

In July 2003, Japan’s best-selling literary journal, *Bungei Shunju*, included a copy of a draft of what is now referred to as former emperor Hirohito’s 1948 “Imperial Edict on Apology”

[45]As quoted by John Dower in his book, *Embracing Defeat*, Japanese novelist Jirô Osaragi wrote a series of editorials in August 1945 after the emperor surrendered and before the occupation forces arrived entitled, “Apology to Departed Heroes.” See John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999), Chapter 16, “What Do You Tell the Dead When You Lose?”: 485. Also footnote 2: 635.

[46]Marilyn Young, “The State and Its Victims Remembering to Forget,” in Mark Bradley and Patrice Petro, eds. *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 11.

as well as an article written by non-fiction author Kyoko Kato explaining the document.[47] In her essay, Kato suggests that her discovery of Hirohito's apology might "broadly recast a page of Showa history (1926-1989)," invoking the long-standing debate over Japan and apology. [48] Many aspects of this document could raise eyebrows. The former emperor, for example, apologized in language that required a Japanese language specialist to render the words comprehensible to the journal's readership. Also, from a strictly positivist standpoint, Hirohito did not write the document himself; likely, he expressed his thoughts to Michiji Tajima, then head of the Imperial Household Agency, who copied them down and in whose papers Kato made her discovery. Most important of all though, Hirohito did not apologize to Japan's overseas victims who have been seeking redress all these years. Instead, he expressed "deep shame" to his *non*-colonial subjects, paying particular attention to those "who lost their property abroad."[49]

The understanding that this document equals "Hirohito's apology" strikes a chord with extremists in Japan who virulently oppose any form of statement of remorse about Japan's attempt to conquer Asia. "Hirohito's apology" may, therefore, make it even more difficult for Japan's victims to receive the imperial apology they long for before they die.[50] In the logic of those who champion a history devoid of any actual content about the past — those determined

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[47]Kyoko Kato, "Fuin Sareta Shosho Soko o Yomitoku," *Bungei Shunju*, July 2003:. 94-113.

[48]Kato 97.

[49]Quoted in Kato 95. For a compelling discussion of the forced return to Japan of settler communities, see Lori Watt as well as Jun Uchida, both in the same volume.

[50]South Korean journalist Koh Sung-il noted that the October 2003 issue of *Bungei Shunju* continues in this vein, leading him to describe a resurgence of support for Hirohito in Japan. See, "Muneh Chunju, 'Hirohito Shideh' Chondanghwa Tukchip," Yonhap Wire Service, 17 September 2003. The demands did not end with the publication of this note. Shortly after its release, on 25 July 2003, 30 Filipino women demonstrated outside the Japanese embassy in Manila to mourn the loss of one among them and to demand an apology. Kyodo News Wire Service posted to www.japantoday.com, 26 July 2003.

never to allow the record of Japan's state-run terror from staining Japanese history writ large — the tragic wartime leader was always and already apologetic.

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