

Peacebuilding in East Asia: From the Perspective of the Historical Reconciliation between Japan and South Korea

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Hello. I am honored to be here today at the Institute for Peace Science at Hiroshima University. The topic is reconstruction and peacebuilding. Whereas Professor Abe discussed the “reconstruction” aspect and talked about how we conduct it, I will address the “peacebuilding” dimension of the topic.

When the Great East Japan Earthquake hit, I was shocked. It was horrible, wasn't it? However, an earthquake hit South Korea just two days ago, and, although it was about magnitude four, the event caused the postponement of an exam, the scholastic ability test, which is equivalent to the National Center Test in Japan, for one week. This reaction implies that South Korea is not well prepared to respond to natural disasters. A lack of preparedness probably is because natural disasters are infrequent in South Korea. Indeed, it is safe to say that South Korea's experience of earthquakes and tsunamis has been rare. Instead, the threat to South

Korea comes from the North.

Although the situation with North Korea is relatively quiet right now, the issue of North Korea's nuclear capacities continues to be an extremely delicate situation. Today, I will talk about ways that peace might be built for the Korean Peninsula and in the East Asian region under these circumstances.

There are two ways to deal with this issue. The first approach is from the perspective of the structure of international systems, and the second way is from the points of view of the relevant actors, namely the states and their citizens. Of these two options, I will consider and discuss the latter approach. Specifically, I will address peacebuilding from the perspective of the historical reconciliation between Japan and South Korea.

The root of the North Korea's nuclear issue is found in its efforts to survive after the structure of the Cold War collapsed. In short, while the structure of the Cold War

was a triad comprised of the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea in one camp, there was a state of equilibrium with South Korea, Japan, and the United States on the other side. When the Soviet Union ceased to exist and the triad collapsed, North Korea was faced with the issue of its survival. North Korea's strategy to attempt to maintain the old Cold War balance was to develop nuclear weapons first and, then, develop its economy. That is today's translational strategy for nuclear capacity and economy in North Korea.

Regarding China, one position somewhat allows North Korea to develop nuclear weapons, but what it really seems to want is to create a buffer zone against the United States. That said, I believe China recognizes that it cannot continue with this approach because hydrogen bombs have been developed through six nuclear tests.

Meanwhile, the United States has two options, namely, to recognize North Korea's nuclear capacities and choose the "balance of terror" or to denuclearize North Korea to create a peaceful regime and withdraw its forces from South Korea. Both options are difficult, which is why North Korea, South Korea, China, and the United States are all in trouble.

Considering the scenarios on the outcome of North Korea's nuclear capacity, the first one would be to maintain the current state of armistice, which would raise the question of whether North Korea's

nuclear weapons should be explicitly or implicitly recognized. The United States would choose the "balance of terror" option by recognizing the nuclear weapons, but doing so would not be in its interests.

The second option would be to enter into a peace agreement, eliminate the nuclear weapons, and withdraw the American forces. This is quite a difficult scenario because it will remain very difficult for the North and South to peacefully coexist for as long as the North has nuclear weapons.

Regarding Korean reunification, it is possibly realistic because it would happen in the distant future, but I believe it would be difficult to realize. I am not an expert in this area, and, since I cannot predict what will happen, I will focus on my area of specialty.

First, these are ideas that concern the level of international relationships among regimes, and I believe it would be extremely difficult for South Korea to take independent action. In the context of international coexistence, it is obviously difficult for any country, including the United States and Japan, to unilaterally act. Therefore, South Korea should take appropriate measures regarding this issue based on the international situation and how it develops.

Considering this, the discussion refines down to what we can do and, in my opinion, South Korea should work on the basics and foundation, which are the

necessary changes to be made regardless of what happens under whatever international regime exists. South Korea could independently do this, and it should take the initiative to do so. This approach would develop and maintain friendly relations with neighboring countries, remove elements that disrupt peacebuilding, eliminate factors of conflict, and build trustful relationships. South Korea could take these steps. The country needs to convince its neighbors that establishing peace through reunification is more desirable than divisive disputes and conflicts.

Conflict takes various forms. There are armed conflicts, such as wars and terrorism, and there are territorial conflicts, trade conflicts, religious conflicts, cultural conflicts, and conflicts based on history. From the perspective of eliminating the factors that cause conflicts with neighboring countries, I will address the particular conflict based on South Korea's history with its neighbor, Japan. This perspective offers a way to resolve or manage the historical conflict that impedes peacebuilding between Japan and South Korea.

At this point, let us consider the relationship between the concept of "reconstruction," which is the subject of today's discussion, and historical conflicts. When a conflict occurs, destruction tends to follow. Some of this destruction is physical, and some of it is psychological. The

physical aspect includes the destruction of basic social systems and casualties. The psychological damage includes such things as psychic damage and mental traumas. Moreover, states lose dignity, which influences the sense of identity.

In this context, reconstruction is understood as restoration of the original state; however, when we consider whether it is even possible to restore the original state, we find that it probably cannot be done. Considering the physical damages, I doubt that it is possible to revive the victims through reconstruction. The best-case scenario would be to rebuild while moving forward. It is not possible to undo the damage; thus, reconstruction is not restoration. It is creating things anew.

Similarly, it is not possible to undo the psychological damage and disability caused by a conflict. We cannot treat psychological damage as if it never happened. Therefore, what must happen is that the country matures. It means that the country should mentally mature, which is precisely what we mean by the term "reconciliation." So, I believe the combination of reconstruction and reconciliation makes peacebuilding possible.

From that point of view, the historical conflicts between Japan and South Korea are long-term issues in which emotion rules reasoning and taboos determine what can and cannot be discussed. The conflicts also involve the two national identities and,

sometimes, justification seems to be more important than actual benefits.

As a result, as you surely know, the militaries are at issue between South Korea and Japan, and, although the two governments reached agreement in December of 2015, there was not a resolution and the dispute continues. Currently, it is deadlocked. With Moon Jae-in as president, South Korea is searching for a way to break through the impasse and find a way to do something about it. However, the situation is quite difficult.

By the way, the message, “Let’s make bold and frank discussions,” is at this international symposium. In support of that statement, I will somewhat boldly talk about a way that the historical conflicts between Japan and South Korea might be eliminated and reconciliation achieved. First, I will review the historical relations between Japan and South Korea.

At the end of World War II in 1945, Japan was defeated. This meant liberation for South Korea. Subsequently, diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea were normalized in 1965. This achievement was made possible through the leadership of President Park Chung-hee and Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil. I refer to this period as “the 1.0 era of Japanese and South Korean relations.”

Then, in 1998, President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Obuchi declared the Japan-South Korea partnership. I name this period “the 2.0 era of Japanese

and South Korean relations.” Various action plans agreed to by President Kim Dae-jung and Prime Minister Obuchi were implemented. Twenty years have passed, and 2018 will mark the 20th anniversary of that declaration. I am sure that numerous events will be held next year, but we should not let them be mere memorials. I believe we need a groundbreaking plan at that point to initiate “the 3.0 era of Japanese and South Korean relations.” I have several ideas on that topic, and I will share a couple of them with you today.

I believe the first step should be to learn from the 2.0 era. That is, we should reflect on what happened during the 2.0 era and, after completing that process, we will be prepared to enter the 3.0 era. We could begin with a joint symposium for Japan and South Korea. The agenda could include various items for discussion, such as the historical meaning of the 2.0 era, the status of the action plans, and the types of things to be explored in the 3.0 era. This type of symposium could be held at various places and in various ways.

I believe that the second step should be to consider establishing a joint citizens’ assembly for Japan and South Korea. I believe it also would be important for the Japanese and South Korean citizens to gather to converse about historical issues and to present the understandings they reach during that process. By doing that, the people who attend those meetings would be able to discuss creating a

community comprising Japan and South Korea without reference to nationality. I believe that the 3.0 era would begin when discussion on this new community spreads with the incentive to establish a Japan-South Korea community.

To implement these ideas, I hope the Institute for Peace Science at Hiroshima University, our Peace and Democracy Institute at Korea University, and the Global Institute for Japanese Studies at Korea University have a central role.

Finally, I will share my sense of the three principles of reconciliation needed to enter the 3.0 era. I aim to establish a direction and principles that differ from those of the reconciliation between Japan and South Korea during the 1.0 era and the 2.0 era.

The first principle is that we need reflective vision. I mean that, now, when we study or argue about conflict issues between Japan and South Korea, it generally become a self-centered discussion. That is, we selfishly ignore things about ourselves or attack things about the other party. However, I believe it is important to reflectively investigate the causes and processes in which the conflict arose. We need a new perspective, which is equitable concerning the issues and reasons that the parties act the way they do.

The second principle is about reconciliation as a process. The reconciliation of the 2.0 era involved the forgiveness and acceptance of the victims

after the apology of the wrongdoer and the subsequent establishment of reconciliation. In that process, reconciliation is the end. Without the apology of the wrongdoer and the forgiveness of the victim, reconciliation is impossible. That is why the current deadlock situation exists between Japan and South Korea.

However, reconciliation is not a one-time event; it is gradually achieved as we move forward one step at a time. Its process even might be endless. In the course of that process, a joint effort to confirm the historical facts is necessary, and the past must be remembered and memorialized based on those confirmed facts with cooperation and interaction into the future. Therefore, I believe reconciliation is an endless process.

The third principle of reconciliation is to involve the public. In South Korea, the people who talk about this history are those who are victims and the citizen groups that support them. In Japan, conscious intellectuals and the radical right are engaged in the discourse, and the governments of both countries are involved. However, I believe we need to create a space for open discussions with ordinary citizens. I believe it is essential to openly share these historical issues with ordinary citizens.

In conclusion, if we were to steadily proceed down this path of reconciliation as a process, peace and unification of the Korean Peninsula, and subsequent

peacebuilding in the East Asian region,
would be realizable, which ultimately
would contribute to world peace.

Thank you