

Memories and Aporias in the Japan-Korea Relationship 日本・ コリア関係における記憶と内部矛盾

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War of 1905

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2010 is the centennial year of Japan's takeover of Korea. The history of this event is of enormous significance to the 20th century, and not simply because it garnered Japan a foothold on mainland Asia. Although Koreans see it very differently, for Japan, the 1910 annexation of Korea established Japan's entry as a power on the world stage.

This condition collapsed, of course, in total defeat in 1945. With the end of American occupation in 1952, however, Japan was supposed to have regained its independence, or so the national story goes, as do rather significant supporting international frameworks such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund. Yet despite the phoenix of Japan's postwar rise from the ashes, the renewed 1960 security pact with the United States — and its substantial 1990s readjustments — blatantly compromised Japan's sovereignty and extended Japan's occupation-era dependence on the United States in open and hidden ways. Many have long contended this, especially in Okinawa. Today, however, the voices questioning the nature of Japanese sovereignty come from wildly divergent corners and point in radically competing ways. The mounting crisis surrounding the relocation of American bases and marines in Okinawa as well as the revelations about the security pact's so-called secret deals between Washington and Tokyo allowing the US to bring nuclear weapons into Japan, have made all of this more salient. The problem becomes more complicated still when the question of Japan's role in Asia gets factored in, largely because of the ways in which Japan's place in Asia's twentieth century has come to be nationally remembered, rather than historically learned.

The question of how history fits in to current conditions and what to do with it is primary, despite efforts by those who manage the region's affairs to make it secondary to immediate concerns of security and economics.



Map showing events of Russo-Japanese

The success today of the US-Japan-South Korea vilification of North Korea campaign reveals this most clearly: even to suggest historical context or reason for any of North Korea's behavior makes one out as an apologist for the brutal regime. To be sure, in 2010 North Korea the leadership sustains horrendous living conditions for many of its people. Individual rights and freedoms are absent for almost all, its generals fire missiles right and left, and the country's nuclear program steals funds that should be spent feeding hungry people and fostering development. That Washington continues, however, to demand that Pyongyang do what it wants before it will even discuss a peace treaty to end the war in lieu of the 1953 armistice means that American officials are dogmatically refusing to see the United States' place in the problem. Washington's willfully ahistorical approach to complicated issues comes at the cost of unnecessarily high security risks for the region as well as the immediate need to get food to starving people. Moreover, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's alignment with Washington vis-à-vis relations with North Korea requires by default that Seoul at least appear to pretend to support Tokyo's refusal to engage with North Korea until the matter of the Japanese citizens kidnapped in the 1970s and 1980s by North Korean agents is cleared to Japan's satisfaction. This is the issue that has "kidnapped" Japanese politics since its 2002 public disclosure. [1] The question remains: how has a country with the immense problems that confront North Korea checkmated the nation with the most powerful military in world history and makes the descendants of Imperial Japan run to Washington to ensure that the United States bolster its myopic mantra that before all else North Korea come clean about a handful of Japanese missing to the 20th century?

Although Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio's administration has signaled shifts from the "abductees above all" approach that Japan's

Liberal Democratic Party pursued from 2002-2009, to the continued bewilderment of many in Washington, Beijing, and Seoul, Japan's regional policy still champions the abductee issue in the same breath as nuclear weapons, indicative of the fact that the LDP's stance succeeded in abducting Japanese society and blinding it to the nation's past actions in the Korean peninsula. In the wake of Japan's collapsed empire, the founders of North Korea held purge trials against those among them most complicit with Japanese control. [2] "Bad Japan" stories wove North Korea together from the nation's inception in markedly different ways from the South, where, as is well known, many of those most complicit with Japanese rule glided into American-approved positions of power, the physical and phenomenological tendrils of which exist very much to this day. The centrality then, and in many respects truth of North Korea's "bad Japan" thesis rests on the stark fact that Japan kidnapped and enslaved millions of Koreans during the colonial era.

This, of course, is the deep divide between Japan and its Asian neighbors that Japan's political and business leaders have long chosen to ignore in charting the nation's place in the region. In simplest terms, the abduction story failed to impress Asians because of the still oozing human wounds of empire, war, and decades of official denial. Japan found itself isolated because of its deep and deeply-layered history with stolen bodies, giving it no choice but to take the abduction story to Washington — imploring the United States to take up its cause in the name of human rights and international security, all made easy through soft channels paid for by Japanese taxpayers via their Foreign Ministry such as the international distribution and screening of the animated "Megumi" movie. [3] Championing Japan's stance on the abduction matter against North Korea continues of course to necessitate Washington's ignoring the region's disinterest in the story, which of course only makes sense to a United States complicit in sustaining

Japan's official silence on pre-1945 history as the deep structure of America's post-1945 use of Japan, its soil, its people, its wealth.

Memories of Abduction

On February 3, 2010, a United Nations' special rapporteur on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances visited Niigata, Japan to investigate the site where the most internationally known of Japan's abductees, 13 year-old Yokota Megumi, tragically disappeared on November 5, 1977 on her way home from badminton practice. At a time when the United Nations has authorized economic sanctions against North Korea for its nuclear and conventional weapons testing, it is unsurprising that the abductee issue — especially through the lens of Megumi's story — has found such a place of prominence. At the same time, however, the Japanese government's urging resolution of this history stands in such stark contrast to its official obduracy at the UN regarding discussion of its record of involvement in the comfort women's history — Japan's state-sponsored sexual enslavement of up to 200,000 women and girls from throughout Asia between 1938 and 1945 — that it makes troubled meaning for all of this and in particular for Japan's international leadership regarding human rights among other things. What the UN abductee report will determine remains open-ended, and the introduction of an international monitoring committee may, in fact, not end up entirely to Japan's liking. This is what happened with the debacle surrounding Megumi's purported DNA evidence, the controversy which produced an extremely rare publication: a scathing editorial in the respected international science journal, *Nature* (which almost never has editorials), condemning the Japanese government for interfering in scientific investigation for crass political ends. [4]

International monitoring committees becoming involved in the abductee history — especially in

Niigata — introduce echoes, however, of a separate yet overlapping history from the late 1950s. The reverberations stem from when members of the International Committee of the Red Cross visited Japan to help organize and legitimate the planned removal of Koreans in Japan to North Korea. At that time, as a result of efforts between ICRC officials and a small number of Japanese and North Korean politicians, over 93,000 people left Japan from Niigata and travelled to Wonsan, North Korea to take part in the "Great Patriation of the Fatherland" scheme that lasted from 1959 to 1984. [5]

They were never able to leave North Korea, and only today have the inner workings of this history begun to come to light, raising questions from "who knew what when?" to "did ethnic cleansing really take place in postwar Japan?" And, most pressingly, with stories from recent North Korean refugees in Japan "can anything be done to help those still alive and wanting to get out?" In short, everything about this history makes even the word "Niigata" resonate strangely in the Korean community in Japan.

When the "Patriation" program ceased in 1984, the Niigata ferry service continued as a passenger and light cargo ship. Today, however, the berth where the ship moored in Niigata sits empty. There is no tangible evidence that the ferry and the abducted Japanese are of a piece, yet when the abductee story broke in 2002 in Japan, the surrounding maelstrom swept the boat and its history into its midst. Many of the kidnap victims disappeared along the Japan Sea coast, and, moreover, Megumi disappeared within the city itself where a banner flies at all times on city hall promising never to forget her. In 2002, overnight the Niigata ferry became one with the kidnapping of Japanese, its separately sad history moot, and in this context, the city's name resonates hard now everywhere in Japan.

On December 14, 2009 in a relentless rain, about seventy people gathered at the end of a non-descript pier at the city's major downtown port to mark 50 years since the departure of the first ferryboat leaving Japan for North Korea. In 1959, 975 people boarded a Soviet-flagged ship that day and sailed from Niigata to great fanfare and publicity. 92,365 others would follow, with most leaving Japan during the program's first few years. After the program ended, the service continued regularly, and throughout - first with the Soviet "Kurilion" and then the North Korean "Mangyongbong" — the ships coursed a well-known route.



The ferry Mangyongbong lying idle in the North Korean port of Wonsan, May 2009

Niigata was, after all, the main exit port for Japanese settlers and soldiers to Manchuria, the "Gateway to Asia" as it became known. Many followed the Joetsu trunk line from Tokyo in their travels, a new route which opened for business on September 1, 1931 two weeks before the Mukden incident. Hundreds of thousands would follow its path from Tokyo to Niigata and on to Wonsan, Ch'ongjin, or Najin on the northeastern Korean coast and then move inland. Niigata's ferry routes thus

became the vital connection between the empire's center (Tokyo) and "Shinkyo" (New Capital) of Manchukuo, as Changchun was expectantly renamed, and, in 1938 when a Japanese joint commercial venture launched the "Gassan" liner from Niigata harbor, it was the largest ship on the Sea of Japan, moving thousands upon thousands back and forth.



Sailing to Manchukuo (poster)

After August 1945, some Japanese fleeing the continent arrived in Japan via Niigata, but most Koreans leaving Japan travelled from Shimonoseki in the south to Busan. The Americans ran the show, after all, and Busan was under their command, while Wonsan was not. The first regular service to resume between Japan and northern Korea was the 1959 repatriation ferry, meaning that it began a month before the revised US-Japan Security

Treaty was signed, the terms of which gripped Japan in America's anti-communist embrace even more tightly than the earlier version. As a result, the Niigata boat to North Korea was a perpetual question mark coursing back and forth atop water effectively owned by the United States Navy with American and Soviet submarines chasing each other underneath. Throughout most of this time, the ship to North Korea itself drew little reaction in Japan — negative or otherwise — although the Niigata-Japanese North Korean Return Assistance Association tried hard to give it a place of pride, regularly touring the city's schoolchildren and ladies' associations aboard the ship, holding festive and well-documented parties for those leaving Japan (recording the restaurant, the menu, who attended, whether they wore traditional Korean dress or Western fashions), and marking the ship's commemorative moments (10,000th passenger, 50,000th, 15th year) with banners and posters hung throughout the city's downtown area. In short, no one in Niigata appeared to feel that there was anything to hide or fear about any of it.

Noticeably, conditions changed as superpower tensions escalated regional alarms during the 1980s which helped terminate the exodus scheme, meaning also that the ferry then became the sole means by which people of Korean ethnicity in Japan could visit North Korea or send word or money to relatives there. Gradually, the ship itself drew more notice, often unwelcome, and at the end of the 1990s when Kim Jong-il launched a series of missile tests in the Sea of Japan, the ferry, its passengers, and its supporters became targets of open attack, including the face-slashing assault of Niigata Governor Hirayama Ikuo in December 1998. [6] The abduction revelations upped the ante even further, and extremist-backed or led protests frequently interrupted the ferry's service, which finally shut down after North Korea's July 2006 missile test. Today, a bold-faced sign at the immigration

bureau at Niigata's airport states that ballistic missiles are responsible for discontinued passage between the countries, although popular perception throughout Japan would add a large dose of the abductee story, making any remembrance of the ferry's history difficult to carry off.

We Won't Forget the Day

At December 2009's "We Won't Forget the Day" ferry commemoration, almost all of this history was absent. In contrast to the citywide celebrations that launched the first ship in 1959, a somber resolve prevailed at its 50th anniversary with the ceremony's registered participants filing through the dock's security gate for an ID check. Only a handful of locals were there, most of the participants having traveled together from Tokyo that morning by train (on the Joetsu line). They would return there immediately afterwards. Things began with a small woman in her 60s speaking eloquently through angry tears in the slanting rain about her lost family and her lost existence. The event's organizer read from a letter he had delivered to the cabinet minister responsible for abduction matters, Nakai Hiroshi (born, incidentally, in Changchun), who would hand it to Prime Minister Hatoyama. Three large and powerfully voiced monks intoned the dead and missing, standing at the edge of the pier to get closer to North Korea to do so, and a famous dancer from South Korea exorcised the space, accompanied by plaintive drums and flutes. Everyone threw white carnations into the sea, and I prayed alongside a friend for his father's brother who might still be alive but no one really knew.

The simplicity of the hour-long event notwithstanding, the group's letter to Prime Minister Hatoyama tells a history that departs so radically from the only narrative in play today — the abductees as the sum total of Japan's relations with North Korea — that it will be difficult if not impossible for it to gain

the social traction its contents require. The letter nonetheless demonstrates sharp political acumen, honed by profound worry and daily ostracism. It reveals, too, how official Japan has long failed its people:

To: Prime Minister Hatoyama
Yukio

Subject: Japanese-North Korean
Diplomacy for the Return of
"Japanese Wives"

On December 14, 1959, the first repatriation ship departed Niigata harbor for Wonsan, North Korea carrying 975 Korean residents of Japan and their Japanese wives. From that day until 1984, a total of 93,340 people crossed the Sea of Japan as part of the North Korean Repatriation Plan. 50 years have passed, and those who have returned are involved in helping others come to Japan. At present, about 200 have fled North Korea and have entered Japan, including 6 Japanese wives...For the most part, the 1831 Japanese wives, who were never allowed back to Japan and were forced to become North Korean comrades despite having Japanese citizenship, have died meaningless deaths without having their wish fulfilled to return to their ancestral land.

...We seek the release of all those trapped in North Korea as a result of the repatriation program. At present, over 100 "Japanese wives" are thought to be alive in North Korea. They are in their 70s and 80s and believe that, "While we are alive, the Japanese government will surely help us." ...For Japan to proceed successfully in steps to

normalize with North Korea it must first guarantee the safe departure of all Japanese there. Once North Korea has guaranteed the departure of all Japanese, then we will resolve the Japanese abductee problem together with the "Japanese wives" problem.

The world is outraged by the North Korean abduction of Japanese. The international community's concern would only heighten if it were made aware of the "Japanese wives" whom North Korea has refused to let leave for 50 years. There is but a little time left for those who are still alive...This is an urgent matter of protecting Japanese people.

Sakanaka Hidenori, Chair

Japan Immigration Policy Institute

Sakanaka and those who gathered with him in Niigata could have sent a very different letter to Hatoyama. They could have demanded, for example, full disclosure from the Japanese government about its role in the repatriation scheme which worked to shed Japan of roughly one hundred thousand people of Korean origin that officials saw as socially undesirable. Or, they could have demanded a full accounting of how those who went to North Korea from Japan got to Japan in the first place. They could have alluded to promises that returnees would be allowed to travel freely to Japan after three years. They could also have asked the government to investigate the ongoing attacks against their members.

All these demands would have fallen flat, however, and would have further marked those determined to remember the ferry's history as

not Japanese. Tellingly, the group can bring its history into the open by focusing on the unquestionably Japanese victims — and elderly female ones at that — of what any United Nations investigating committee would surely determine to be numerous and repeated violations of individual rights involving the governments of North Korea and Japan (and perhaps the International Committee of the Red Cross which supported the repatriation), mentioning also a desire to "seek the release of all those trapped." The problem, of course, is that should the government of Japan address this fact of its 20th century experience as history, it would simultaneously have to address the very demands that the group did not mention, those pertaining to the rights of Koreans repatriated from Japan. On top of that, it would find itself doing what history does: leading from one story to another until a radically different 20th century came into being as the nation's modern past in which, among other things, Japan's post-1945 economic prowess cannot be severed from its pre-1945 history of slave labor.

The only language spoken at the ferry's memorial event was Japanese, several "aigos" from the Korean shaman dancer notwithstanding. The people, however, were remarkably diverse by Japanese standards bringing much of the problem of being Japanese to the fore, made all the more poignant by the group's pleading for their collective past through the bodies of the Japanese wives caught in its midst, women who were mothers to several participants. Gathered on Niigata's cold pier were resident Koreans of Japan naturalized as Japanese, resident Koreans of Japan with well-known ties to South Korea, and resident Koreans of Japan with well-known ties to North Korea, as well as resident Koreans of Japan with ties to both who could be described only, however, as apolitical, making it clear why many Koreans in Japan prefer now to be called "Corean" rather than "resident" this or that. There were some very prominent

Japanese activists, and professors, and the very big monks as well. I was there, and there were also some shy young women who stood out because they were much more conservatively dressed than others their age in the mix. Finally I understood. These women had escaped North Korea; some were the children of returnees, and others were their friends.

Likely this all is part of the genius of the memorial event's organizer, Sakanaka Hidenori. Long a renegade within the Ministry of Justice, Sakanaka retired in 2005 after 35 years of distinguished government service during which he worked extensively with Japan's Korean community. This, he maintained in the letter to Hatoyama, gave him the authority to speak for the group, especially when combined with his current efforts on behalf of North Korean refugees in Japan. His preference for inclusive action and for keeping things focused on the present is one with his 2005 book: *Immigration Battle Diary*. [7] In that, his answer to today's "whither Japan?" question is simple: it is either a "small" or "big" country, depending entirely on what its leaders decide immediately for the meaning of being Japanese which they must decide solely through immigration policy. Labeled "Doomsday" by some, Sakanaka's explanation is clear: a "small" Japan is a pleasant if inward-looking country 50 years hence that leaders have allowed to decline along current reproduction rates from its present 127 million to 80 million people: read something sort of Scandinavian with miso soup and yakizakana for supper, helping out with victims of the occasional earthquake. "Big" Japan is equally unambiguous: 50 years from now it is a growing and vibrant nation of 180 million with a solid and forward-looking global posture. To achieve the latter (which is, of course, how many who advocate a "strong" Japan already describe it) Japan must radically change the country's immigration and naturalization policies and accept no fewer than 20 million people from outside and make it socially

possible for them to be Japanese (which is, of course, not at all how anyone already describes Japan). In short, Sakanaka argues that Japan's leaders must make social integration possible for those who differ from pre-conceived and widely fostered ideas of Japanese-ness and reorganize what Japanese society has come to believe about being a national body. This, in no small part, rests on knowing and coming to grips with Japan's recent past.

The Japanese Emperor and Korea

In September 2009, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak marked the Japanese Democratic Party's history-making win by inviting Emperor Akihito to Korea during the 2010 centennial as well as extending his congratulations to Hatoyama Yukio. Lee was reiterating many earlier invitations to Akihito — begun first in 1986 when he was crown prince reciprocating his hosting then-President Chun Doo-hwan — as well as trying to plumb the meaning of recently elected Prime Minister Hatoyama's much vaunted East Asian Community.

Two things are pretty clear as far as Korea and the emperor of Japan go: first, Korean officials see no reason why Korea should be second string to China in terms of hosting an imperial visit, which has remained the case since 1992. Second, it has been pretty clear to all Koreans since the joint World Cup soccer games where the emperor stands vis-à-vis the prime minister regardless of the constitution, making the emperor's place in the reconciliation problem clear. I'm not a rabid soccer fan, but the late spring day in 1996 when the success of Japan and Korea's joint bid for the World Cup hit the newsstands remains a strong memory. Walking through the Ikebukuro train station in Tokyo after six or seven hours in the Rikkyo University archives, I was besieged by a swirl of characters crossing the evening papers: "Japan/Korea/Emperor/Ceremony/Assassination ." I had to stop walking to decide whether I was

in 1910 or the then present and then read to understand that local elation over "winning" the soccer bid for Japan was tempered by the "what to do with the emperor?" problem in its mix. How could the emperor attend the head of state functions in Korea given the countries' open animosities? In 2002, Japan's Foreign Ministry finally said no to the emperor attending the opening ceremonies in Seoul — what with then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's love of Yasukuni derailing Japan and South Korea's expensively planned "Year of Friendship." Nevertheless, during the closing ceremonies outside Tokyo the emperor and empress joined South Korean President and Mrs. Kim Dae-jung in the head of state box while Prime Minister Koizumi sat several rows back with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroder (whom Koizumi asked at the last minute to join him lest he appear so hopelessly second fiddle and dateless to the global viewing audience).

The 100th anniversary of Japan's failed colonization of Korea brings to the fore numerous problems of Japanese national definition wrapped into histories of wasted lives and uncertainty over whom to describe as Japanese. It is important to recall that an argument over the Japanese emperor launched the modern history of involvement between Japan and Korea, and, arguably, Japan's imperialist expansion writ large. The 1873 political turmoil in Japan — splendidly known as the "Conquer Korea Debates" — revolved around competing Japanese views over how to respond to Korea's refusal to accept Japan's claim that the newly installed Emperor Meiji was now on a par with China's Son of Heaven and was, therefore, above the lesser Korean king (who had been the Tokugawa shogun's equal until Meiji's emissaries arrived with all this information). The 1910 annexation of Korea came about as a result of how this debate played out over the next few decades, bringing us to the centennial today.

In January 2010, a low-budget theater production in Tokyo gave new life to the late 19th and early 20th century decades. Before heading into the terrain occupied today by people wanting to take Japan backwards, it is important to notice how a very different small minority in Japan began this anniversary year thinking about rulers and ruled and the history of Japan and Korea. From January 20-24, the long-established Korean troupe, Shinjuku Ryozanpaku, staged a performance of Korean playwright O T'aesok's 1994, "Toraji" (Bellflower) in a basement black box in Shinjuku called the Tiny Iris. The play tracks Japan's takeover of Korea between an incident in 1882 which brought Japanese and Chinese troops into the Korean court right up through the 1910 annexation, centering its action on the court and especially the assassination of Queen Min and the forced abdication of Korean Emperor Kojong, and, ultimately the surrender of the royal seals to the victorious Japanese colonizers. In short, for Koreans it is a play-by-play of schoolchildren's required history. The sheer ingenuity of the Ryozanpaku performance lay in doing it in Japan, in Japanese. The troupe's customary pyrotechnics and more-naked-than-Hair scenes were great, but in many ways, the real marvel was telling the story at all. The audience hung on every turn.

Shinjuku Ryozanpaku's Director Kim Sujin has long produced avant-garde stories of the interwoven realities of Japanese and Korean modern lives. The spectacle's final thrust made real the two parts of today's whole with simple brilliance. The increasingly feckless and increasingly paranoid Kojong despairing of his disappearing powers in Japanese in a cramped, Shinjuku basement blended the history that brought down Korea in 1910 into Japan in 1945 when Hirohito grasped at his own throne even as advisers urged him to abdicate. [8]

The Neonationalist response to Koreans in Japan: The Zaitokukai

Cartoonist/pundit/self-aggrandizer Kobayashi Yoshinori is not news, nor is he the intellectual lynchpin of those who want a "strong" emperor in Japan today. Yet he has mass appeal, and he has now raised a generation in his wake who have either learned history from him, or, worse, have learned to tell history the way he does because it works and it sells. Kobayashi in January 2010 joined today's "Strong" emperor/"No emperor to Korea!" moment with a vengeance in a special series for the self-described "International Intelligence" magazine, Sapio, whose circulation of roughly 200,000 copies for the January 2010 issue was, it is safe to say, many times greater than the 200-300 people who saw "Toraji" that same week. [9] Only several frames in to a 25-page spread, Kobayashi makes his Tea Party for a King pitch, sliding his self-portraited image into the middle of a tirade over the unprecedented (in Kobayashi's eyes) political use of the emperor in December 2009 with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, demanding, "Are we going to put up with this?" No, of course "we" aren't! "Someone who doesn't know his history and feels no shame would make the emperor his private possession out of pure lust for power. And this deranged person, (DPJ party leader) Ozawa Ichiro, is now trying to get the emperor to go to Korea! We must put a stop to this!"

More worrisome than Kobayashi, however, is a young man named Sakurai Makoto (nom de guerre, Doronpa). Sakurai grew up under Kobayashi's cloud, and emerged on his own by capitalizing on Yamamoto Sharin's "Hating Korea" manga series (2005-present), publishing a separate "Hating Korea" comic. [10] Its drawings and text aim for an even lower common denominator than Kobayashi and Sharin combined, yet Sakurai/Doronpa aspires higher off the page. [11] On June 9, 2007, he established the Citizens League to Deny Resident Foreigners Special Rights (the Zaitokukai). Among other things, the Zaitokukai urges open violence against Koreans in Japan (and to a lesser degree Chinese and

others) in an extensive set of YouTube postings and regular demonstrations in front of government buildings, newspaper offices, the Korean embassy and consulates, as well as through neighborhoods and in front of schools. The group and its leader's significance must not be measured by the several thousand who count themselves as contributing members throughout Japan but rather in their publicly issued orders for violent insurrection and/or military action (depending on whether the enemy is within or without), which together define the "Zaitokukai" as Japan's fiercest and most dangerous hate group today.

As the group's self-posted videos on YouTube demonstrate to anyone with access to the internet (the police, for example), Zaitokukai members openly threaten those they view as impediments to their vision of Japan. Unsurprisingly, they target individuals and groups who are weak within the Japanese legal system by stalking and harassing them, and trying customary bullying tactics of getting the victim to throw the first punch. Today, they most viciously zero in on a small group of elderly ethnic Koreans living in an enclave north of Kyoto, called Utoro. The 200 or so remaining residents of Utoro descend from more than 1300 Koreans brought there in 1940 by the Japanese government to build a military air strip that was abandoned in 1945. The forsaken Koreans turned to the land first to sustain themselves, which the auto giant Nissan technically owned, first as a wartime airplane manufacturer then refashioned for car manufacture, where many of Utoro's residents also worked. The company sold the land in 1987, and the new owner demanded the residents' eviction from the 5 acre plot where they had long lived, filing a series of lawsuits that wound up in 2000 in Japan's supreme court which declared Utoro's inhabitants illegal squatters without rights or papers. The aging Koreans stayed on, vowing to honor their parents' hardship and to "die under their houses" if need be. [12]



Kim Kyo-il, leader of the Utoro protesters, reads a petition to South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun in Seoul in 2007

For Zaitokukai members, many of whom were not born when the lawsuits began in 1987, Utoro's residents are obvious prey, and in a December 2009 video clip, they show others what to do: to the tune of "Clap for the Killers," local Zaitokukai leaders block out the area on a map and distribute threatening leaflets into residents' mailboxes in ways shockingly evocative of the Hitler Youth brigades or the American Ku Klux Klan. This apparently proud display of what to do with the internet only builds, however, on a series of videos posted in December 2008 in which Doronpa leads his followers as well as some of their very young children through the residents' neighborhood armed with their constitutionally guaranteed rights to wave the now national flag and speak freely, even hate speech yelled through megaphones. [13]



Doronpa

Consistent with the group's general belief that Koreans are to blame for all things wrong in Japan, the Zaitokukai stands ardently opposed today to any talk of the Japanese emperor visiting Korea. Their "No emperor to Korea!" rallying cry is, moreover, tightly wound into the most provocative area of relations with Korea, at least for Koreans: the territorial dispute between the countries about islands known in Japanese as Takeshima and in Korean as Dokdo. The Zaitokukai's call was loudly proclaimed at its February 2010 demonstrations throughout Japan: "No emperor to Korea! Take back Takeshima from Korea by force! Protest now! The Japanese government must take back Takeshima by force and even military power! The emperor will go to Korea only when Takeshima is returned!" One immediately noticeable feature of the Zaitokukai cry is tying the emperor of Japan to

the mundane world of territory. Across time in the place now called Japan, the term "tenno" noticeably differed from other rulers (especially, eventually from European counterparts) in never having specific lands attached to the title. Conditioning an imperial visit to Korea today on Japan's assured control of the disputed islands blends together the broader passion in current Japanese nationalism to expand its borders and to have Japan take proactive military action. Combined, this would bring the emperor and Japan back to the Prussian model so helpful in the 1870s.

Defining the National Space

The most potent feature across a wide spectrum of Japanese discussions about the nation today is, however, neither the emperor nor who or what is Japanese. The strongest binding force is a focus on space, on the shape of Japan. A century ago, Japanese leaders engaged Japan with imperialism's "Great Game" and conquered overseas territories to expand the island nation into a continental empire. Now, however, Japan's definers seek instead to emphasize the nation's reach in terms of the oceans that surround it. In 1952, the American-drawn San Francisco Treaty at once redefined Japan as a sovereign nation (contingent, of course, on the presence of American troops and bases) and redrew the country's limits to roughly the same dimensions that had appeared on maps when Admiral Perry set sail in 1852, save for the sure addition of Hokkaido. During the following decades of economic rebirth, for many the country's island nature became useful for explaining Japan's catastrophic defeat in 1945, the nation's inherent weakness. Recently, however, the idea of island Japan as a source of strength has re-emerged, the trick now being to secure solid and maximized definitions for the oceans around it, odd as it is that international law defines water as territory. A preoccupation with national space thus has surfaced, with some taking pride that Japan's territorial

oceans make it the world's 6th or 7th largest country, and others pleased that a stretched out measurement of the coastline would make Japan one and a half times bigger than America and twice as large as China. [14]

Interesting as all of this is conceptually, at once it produces two immediate and difficult side effects during this centennial year of Korea's annexation: first, time, that other all-important component in defining a nation, has fallen to a distant second place, compounding problems in exploring Japan's past productively for the present. Second, the volatile territorial dispute over the islands contested with Korea lands right in the middle of this condition, meaning that those who champion the islands' cause for Japan make their arguments through the lens of the nation's currently perceived boundaries, regardless of the history involved. Simply put, the islands are a speck of territory that the American architects of the San Francisco Treaty intentionally left undesignated — being useful to America's then-present interests in the middle of the Korean War — and although the methods of South Korea's 1952 occupation of them was of a piece with its dictatorial practices, Japan's claim now that they became Japan's in 1905 and therefore are Japan's today is bizarre, given to the disposition of the rest of the empire. [15]

On December 25, 2009, Japan's Ministry of Education presented its high school curricular guidelines for history and geography. It was easy for reporters to know where to look for a hook because Tokyo's middle school guidelines had generated substantial fracas with Seoul when they were released in 2008, firmly declaring for the first time that the islands are "under Japanese sovereignty." For all the widely touted era of new politics that Hatoyama's victory ushered in, how would his government handle this matter? Surely it would have to differ from the LDP's position which had hardened perceptibly beginning in 2005 with then-education minister Narayama

Nariaki's provocations and the leadership's open approval of a holiday commemorating the islets' incorporation into the long-vanished Japanese empire. What would the DJP do?

In an act of brazen avoidance, Japan's new high school curricular outline was blank on this hottest of all topics between Japan and Korea. On December 25, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano Hirofumi worked to dispel notions that Japan's new leadership based its decision to write nothing on fears of Korean reaction: "These are textbooks for Japan," he said, "Diplomatic considerations are irrelevant." [16] Education Minister Kawabata Tatsuo denied that there was anything to notice, adding, however, that, "Takehima is our territory," while his Vice Minister Suzuki Kan gave the eyebrow raising explanation that the word "Takehima" (a two character Chinese compound) was not included in the published guidelines to make it shorter and more open to teachers' discretion. Kan's assertion is transparently disingenuous as the "Hoppo Ryodo," the islands disputed with Russia that are four characters long are included, and, moreover, the guidelines instruct teachers to "continue teaching the same content that students learn in middle school" whose curriculum describes the islands as Japan's. Editorials flowed in the following days, with the Yomiuri dropping the gauntlet, "Do it, call it Takehima," and the Asahi demurring, "Let's hope for good teachers". [17] Meanwhile, Mizoguchi Zembe, the fiery governor of Shimane Prefecture which claims the islands, repeatedly shook his head to reporters, growling into television cameras that it was "extremely regrettable" to fail to mention Takehima's name, and South Korea's Foreign Ministry summoned the Japanese ambassador for a reprimand over the islands' lack of mention as Korean territory. [18]

On February 22, 2010, the city of Matsue on the Japan Sea coast in southwestern Japan celebrated the 5th anniversary of "Takehima

Day." Matsue is the capital of Shimane Prefecture, one of Japan's poorest and traditionally most parochial regions. Regardless of national or international maps or realities, Shimane has continued to claim the islands in Japan's name throughout the post-1945 era based on their 1905 incorporation into Japan's then-growing empire. Never mind how the war turned out. During the past decade or so, Shimane's calls that Tokyo assert itself more proactively over the question of these islands have continued to intensify, and to celebrate the 1905 centennial, the regional assembly launched a holiday in its name. Like various Dokdo counterparts in South Korea, it also set up an archive in a government office building and established a research group to gather materials to prove the islands Japanese. On "Takeshima Day" 2010, in revealing parallels to December's din over the high school guidelines, Governor Mizoguchi gave a thumping speech urging Japanese all over the country to pay as much attention to the islands as Koreans: "We cannot let our consciousness of the islands fail us!" while the Tokyo headquarters of the LDP, out for blood in the July 2010 elections, dispatched a record ten of its parliamentarians to promise that the islands were "Japan's." The pointed-tongued politicians stood on top of a little white LDP van covered with the party's losing 2009 slogan, "First things first: the economy!" and complained about Hatoyama's handling of Korean affairs and Okinawa in the same breath. For its part, the ruling DJP steered clear of town that day, even though party leader Ozawa Ichiro had been there the day before, and the Foreign Ministry declined invitations to various ceremonies. The same South Korean parliamentarian who several years ago tried to cut off his finger in protest of the Shimane holiday arrived with several friends and his finger intact and a banner to proclaim that "Dokdo has always been Korean territory and always will be!" while a resident Korean group organized a teach-in at a nearby school, and a joint group of Japanese and Korean pacifists prayed for peace at nearby

Izumo Shrine.

Japan's national, regional, and local newspapers and television reported all of this while making little or no mention of the most obvious feature of "Takeshima Day" on the ground: the appearance of 6 or 7 far-right political parties and splinter groups circling town in their hate trucks for two days, snarling traffic and making lots of unpleasant, noisy demands. White-helmeted policemen had not been prepared to greet their arrival on February 21st but were positioned early in the morning of the 22nd at each corner of the historic castle town's outer moat traffic loop. When the little red tourist trolley bus that my son and I rode to sightsee that day rounded the corner in front of the prefectural assembly building, the 20 or so other passengers let out a collective, "Ahhhh." Seeing the large white and blue police bus with flashing red lights surrounded by riot police, I thought, "Good. People do care about this," only immediately to understand that the group's "Ahhhh" came from seeing the beautiful 1611 castle in the distance. Meanwhile, my 4 year-old was clearly and loudly exclaiming, "Mom, look at all the cops! Look at the bus! Mom! MAMA! Look at the cops! Why are they here?" Why indeed and how was it possible for everyone else on the bus to look silently through the present and acknowledge only a perfectly manicured past?

Later that day, the Tokugawa-era costumed tour boat driver gave me some hope. Our boat went under the town's main bridge just as one of the hate group's trucks cruised overhead in full shriek. Their noise drowned him out, and good former school teacher that he was, he paused to let them finish. When our boat and their truck were free of each other, he said simply, "Well, it is Shimane Prefecture's Takeshima Day. The right wing guys show up because they can," and he went back to his stories and songs. Later on, however, a deeper meaning of this problem revealed itself. My son and I were looking at exhibits and buying books

at the Takeshima Archive Office when an unusually loud hate truck slowed to a menacing crawl in front of the building and bellowed, "YOU IDIOTS! YOU SHOULD BE ASHAMED! YOU SELL AWAY JAPAN WITH YOUR INCOMPETENCE! YOU IDIOTS!" The archive staff was visibly shaken, with some jumping up from their desks and rushing to the room's back windows. Two young employees walked around the counter to stand next to my son, who excitedly watched the unmarked, all-black bus through the office window. They told me they had children the same age and just wanted to hold his hand.



Rightists march

On March 29, 2010, Japan's Ministry of Education issued the nation's elementary school guidelines which named the islands Japanese. [19] South Korea's Foreign Minister protested again, while Prime Minister Hatoyama remained silent. It is doubtful that Hatoyama is planning a surprise 100th anniversary present come August's centennial day as polls indicate that his popularity has fallen sharply. His transparent anxiety over naming the nation's territorial boundaries with regard to Korea, however, does nothing but lay bare the problem that a leader of Asia's most

powerful democracy cannot utter a word about these empty rocks because they are now such perilous markers in the contest to tell the region's 20th century, on which the stability and potential of the 21st century would appear to rest. Any mention in Korea's favor would call Hatoyama's Japanese-ness into question and likely cost his party the summer's upper house elections needed to make many of his plans bear fruit — especially the social-economic and environmental ones — while any definitive claim of them for Japan would derail the nervous calm in place this centennial year which is vital to make his hoped-for East Asian Community take form. Problems with Washington moreover make many openly question whether he is even running the country. At the same time, from the other side of Japan, Shimane prefecture has discovered value for itself by trying to give national meaning to a prideful fight with Korea in conjunction with a small number of extremists seeking to secure Japan's boundaries through an imaginary past in which they stand together with the emperor into the future. Again, the extremists' numbers are small, yet when helmeted police spend public money to protect democratically elected officials who agree with them over a common cause — "Takeshima is Japan's!" — things are openly out of sorts in Japan today and, arguably, dangerously so.

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Notes

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[13] [Link 1](#); [Link 2](#).

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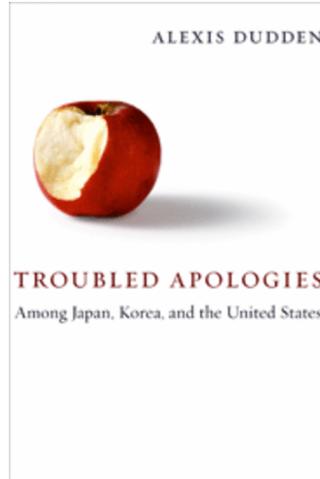
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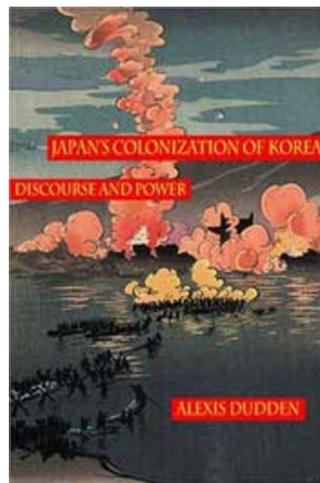
[17] *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 28, 2009; *Asahi Shimbun*, December 27, 2009.

[18] *Asahi Shimbun*, December 26 and 27, 2009; *Hankyoreh*, December 26 and 27, 2009.

[19] *Asahi Shimbun*, March 30, 2010



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