

cultural relativism and methods of fieldwork. They developed an autonomous volunteer organization and formed small groups of mixed Japanese and Korean origins for excavation and discussion. The students and volunteers dug up the historical truth, and tried to find a way past the historical scars and prejudice of the Koreans and the ignorance and denials of the Japanese.

project grew into an ongoing exchange program including fieldwork in Korea to find the surviving families of the victims.

In the past 20 years, over 1,500 participants have worked on these projects. They worked and played together, ate and drank together, and talked and slept together. Through this experience, they built a deep friendship and sense of community that could not be achieved through superficial international exchange programs that frequently overlook or downplay dark historical realities. In the process, they learned each other's languages, and studied and worked in each other's countries. Many fell in love and some married and had children. The workshops, as a rite of passage, changed the lives of many people, and continue today as a reconciliation and peace program for the young generation, extending from Korea and Japan to China (Chung, 2017).



The 1st Korea-Japan Student Workshop for the Excavation of Forced Labor Victims, Shumarinai, Hokkaido 1997.

The excavation of the remains was extremely difficult. Scraping the dirt from the ground, level by level, with shovels and trowels and investigating the traces of burial by slight changes in dirt color, we were able to unearth the facts of horrendous treatment of the dead. They were bent and crouched without coffins in shallow ground, some with fractured skulls, their bodies tangled in roots over the years.

When the first of the remains was found in the dirt, the participants from both countries trembled and cried together. Facing the evidence of this historical crime, the young generation pledged to build a peaceful future together based on truth and reconciliation. This



A Physical Anthropologist Examines Excavated Skeletons, Asajino, Hokkaido, 2006.

2. Repatriation

In 2015, the year of the 70th anniversary of the Independence of Korea from Japanese colonialism, we decided to bring home the

remains of the victims which were kept in temples near the excavation sites in Hokkaido. The families of the victims were getting old, and their memories were slipping away. Their wished urgently for return of the remains for a proper burial in the homeland.

Neither the Korean nor the Japanese government was willing to return the remains to the homeland. We had to carry out the project without any help or cooperation from either government. Rather, we had to worry about possible bureaucratic barriers and institutional interference. The journey took ferries instead of an airplane, and buses instead of trains to avoid possible conflict with government regulations. The film *So Long Asleep, Waking the Ghosts of a War* follows our pilgrimage across the Japanese islands as we carried those remains for proper funeral ceremony and reburial in the cemetery in Seoul.

The journey back home took the route over 3,000 kilometers in seven days. We stopped and held ceremonies of remembrance in Sapporo, Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima and Shimonoseki. This was at a time when the Japanese government was trying to legislate the 'Security Law', which would enable the country to go to war again. The repatriation march arrived at Busan port in Korea at a time when Koreans' mistrust and wariness toward Japan were at their highest.



Procession for the Commemoration Ceremony at Nishihonganji Temple, Kyoto, 2015.

The Japanese representatives of the repatriation group acknowledged and apologized for the past crimes against humanity of Japanese citizens, and urged their government and responsible corporations to follow their example. The distinguished historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2015) describes this as the largest such return of remains by grassroots citizen groups, which is a testimony to the longing of many Japanese people to right the wrongs of wartime and seek reconciliation with neighboring countries. This longing for reconciliation survives despite the rising tides of nationalism in East Asia, and despite recent failures of the Japanese government to address the troubled legacies of war with sincerity and good faith. It is also a testimony to the power of ordinary people to create dialogue across borders and to address deep-seated problems of remembrance and reconciliation.

A huge crowd gathered in Seoul City Plaza to attend the public funeral, and the victims were finally commemorated properly. At the Funeral Ceremony, the director and producer of the film *So Long Asleep*, Prof. David W. Plath, the pioneer media anthropologist, delivered a moving dedication. It reads as followings.

“Now I know that my idea of the human life

cycle has been too narrow. Human life is greater than the cycle that we run from first breath to last gasp. We are known as persons long before we can speak and long after we go silent. A truly civil society will carry its persons through all their years of being known. ... I want Americans to see our images of people in East Asia carrying white boxes. I wish the whole world could see those images and learn from them. Let's imagine a day when it will not only be two dozen people in East Asia, but a day when all the people on this planet will be doing the right thing. Doing what we must do because governments can't do it for us. Doing the free labor of carrying, the free labor that can change boxes holding what was lost into shrines that transport all of human life. That day will be Day One of lasting world peace because finally we all will be carrying one another."

This homecoming project is one example of a worldwide effort to create new ritual forms for confronting traumatic historical events. The film *So Long Asleep* can be considered a visual dedication to the humane collective journey home. It ends with a public funeral ceremony in Seoul City Plaza and re-interment in a new memorial site in Seoul Municipal Cemetery. But the project continues.

Municipal Cemetery, Paju, Korea, 2015.

3. Steppingstone for Peace

During the Chusok Holidays, many visitors came to pay respects to the forced labor victims in Seoul Municipal Cemetery. Not only the victims' families but many ordinary citizens came to commemorate their lives. The Peace Movement organizations in Korea and Japan named this cemetery "Coming Home After 70 Years," introducing it as a "memory site (Nora, 1989)," a place to visit for Korean and Japanese people together to share the history of forced labor and to commemorate the victims.

Lately, we have begun to set a commemorative bronze tablet, named 'Steppingstone for Peace.' For each victim of forced labor in Hokkaido, we are creating a small bronze tablet inscribed with his name and life details in front of his old home in Korea. (The idea comes from a project in Germany, named the Stolperstein, that has placed 56,000 such monuments near the homes of victims of the Holocaust throughout Europe). And near each labor site in Hokkaido we are placing a tablet that lists the names of the men who were sacrificed and describes the historical facts of the place.



Coming Home After 70 Years at Seoul



A Steppingstone for Peace on a Street Near a Victim’s Home, Seoul, 2016.

While regimes and corporations continue to disregard the historical truth, civil organizations have worked to recognize and remember the victimization not as abstract numbers but as individuals, each with a

personal history. The Steppingstone is thus a ‘symbol of remembrance’ as well as a ‘symbol of truth’ that brings the history of life and death of each victim to the sphere of our everyday lives. This, we hope, will provide a steppingstone for reconciliation and peace in East Asia.

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