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draft.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the most controversial area regarding Japan's burden of history for the Koreans has been the "comfort women" or ianfu issue. This dispute has marred the attempts by the Japanese government to initiate a "future oriented" relationship with the newly installed administration in Korea. The issue had remained dormant for 45 years in Korea. In 1988, the South Korean Church Women's Alliance adopted the "comfort women" issue as a tool to stir up objections to the Japanese sex tours in Korea. As popular sentiment for the "comfort women" issue started to gain momentum in Korea and attention worldwide, the Japanese Diet quickly dismissed it as groundless and having no links to the Japanese government neither past nor present. This only served to inflame Korean passions and the "comfort women" issue became a national cause celebre.

The women's movement then sent a letter in October of 1990 to the Japanese prime minister through the embassy in Seoul. In it, they demanded that the Japanese government make full disclosure of the "barbarities," integrate the facts into the historical education system, issue a public apology, establish a memorial and pay compensations. The Japanese government responded in April of 1991 that "there was no evidence of the forced draft of 'comfort women,' so there would be no public apology, disclosures or memorial." They also asserted that the normalization treaty of 1965 settled the question of compensation for all war related grievances. The women's movement responded by sponsoring a series of lecture meetings in both countries which culminated in a former "comfort women," Kim Hak-Sun, going public with her story, the first to do so. On 6 December 1991, Kim and two others who had followed her lead filed a class action law suit against the government of Japan at the Tokyo District Court. The case was expected to be in hearing for a number of years.

On 6 July 1992 the Japanese government issued its first report on the issue based on newly uncovered evidence that directly linked the former Imperial Army with the procurement of "comfort women" and operation of brothels for its soldiers. However, the report pointed out that there was no clear evidence that women were forcefully drafted into the system. Since the publication of this report, several former Japanese military officials have come forward to contradict it. Among other things, they have given evidence that "round ups" were utilized in rural areas of Korea, especially during the final years of the war, to maintain a steady supply of "essential war material" to the front line troops.

The death of Han Jong-Suk, a former "comfort woman," on 3 Feb of this year has given the issue new life and obliged the new administration of Korean president Kim Yong-Sam to officially address the issue. A second Japanese government report promised for February of this year has been postponed to July.

The Politics of the "Comfort Women" Issue:
Japan's Struggle With its Burden of History

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I. The impact of this issue on Japanese-Korean relations and the significance of this relationship(The Puzzle):

The comfort women issue highlights a major obstacle to Japan's emergence as a legitimate world leader beyond the realm of economics. As reported by the Japan Times on 21 February of this year, a South Korean official at a meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights held in Geneva stated, "my delegation is convinced that a genuine friendly relationship between Japan and other countries in our region cannot be realized until Japan willingly cleans itself of its guilty past, whose infamous legacy is lingering in the minds of the Asian people." The inability of the Japanese government to take a constructive and proactive stance towards foreign relations is the essence of this obstacle. The overriding question here is why is Japan unable to effectively resolve the issue of "comfort women" in particular and in general, finally come to terms with its past. I will use two theoretical models, Calder's reactive state and Putnam's two-level games, to analyze the factors that have caused the Japanese government to adopt and then shift its policy on the issue.

Contemporary relations between Japan and Korea are dominated by economic cooperation and competition. Otherwise, the relationship is characterized by mistrust, ambivalence, and indifference. Each facet of this relationship can be traced to a historical root. The Japanese burden of history is especially heavy when it comes to the Koreans. The tragic historical legacy between Japan and Korea is one of the basic elements of the Korean national psyche and often seems to be the overriding factor in its dealings with Japan. The Japanese, for the most part would rather dismiss this burden as a "regrettable" part of history that has been settled and accounted for. As a consequence, they tend to down play the importance of their relationship with Korea. Of course much of this can be attributed to the Koreans' insistence on linking the past with the present.

This seemingly intractable obstacle in Japan-Korean relations undermines one of the most critical bilateral relationships in world politics, in a region which will play a pivotal role in the next century. The criticality of this bilateral relationship does not lie so much in its potential for cooperation and mutual profit, although these are very desirable and attainable goals. Rather, the relationship is critical because its failure and the resulting consequences would be detrimental and possibly disastrous for East Asia and the entire world community. Thus it seems ironic that the tragic historical legacies that have caused Japan and Korea to be separated by the "farthest distance" are the very ones which will compel them to pursue a closer relationship as they each seek to take on more substantive international roles.

II. A reactive state playing the level one game

A. Japan's policy of denial

1. Lack of general support for addressing the issue(nationalism, Japanese attitude towards the burden of history and their willingness to act on them)

2. The lack thus far of a formidable, international demand for resolution

B. Gaiatsu

1. The makings of Asian united effort(possible NK sellout)

2. The UN human rights hearings(Japan's current preoccupation with its role in the UN)

3. The attempt by the Korean government to embarrass the Japanese into action

4. Moves by private Korean groups to apply international laws(international convention on genocide)

C. Theoretical outcome and consequences

III. Playing the level II game

A. The second imagery bases for Japan's foreign policy making:
The players and their win sets

1. Political parties

2. Government bureaucracy(MFA, Cabinet, Diet)

3. Special interest groups(big business, Mitsubishi and its mining operations in Sakhalin, The Association for Considering the Plight of the Comfort Women, other liberal/leftist groups)

B. Players' preferences and coalitions: The nature of the domestic political

1. Money politics

2. Block voting

3. Iron triangles

IV. Conclusions:

A. The driving force behind Japanese foreign policy making

B. The future of Japanese-korean relations: conflict collaboration?