

JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA:  
THE UNFINISHED PAST

17RS E.M. de Man DRS Hill  
March, 1993

University of Leiden  
Holland

## Table of contents

|                                                                                                                              |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction                                                                                                                 | 2  |
| 1. The Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations<br>and the Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-<br>operation | 5  |
| 1.1. The Treaty on Basic Relations                                                                                           | 5  |
| 1.2. The Agreement                                                                                                           | 7  |
| 2. The inheritance of the past                                                                                               | 10 |
| 2.1. The recruitment of Koreans                                                                                              | 10 |
| 2.2. Korean war criminals                                                                                                    | 12 |
| 2.3. The Koreans that stayed behind at Sakhalin                                                                              | 13 |
| 2.4. The South Korean victims of the atomic bombs                                                                            | 15 |
| 2.5. The "comfort women for the army"                                                                                        | 20 |
| 3. The end of the Shōwa era                                                                                                  | 20 |
| 4. The visit of president Roh to Japan                                                                                       | 24 |
| 5. Once again: the comfort women                                                                                             | 31 |
| Conclusion                                                                                                                   | 41 |
| Bibliography                                                                                                                 |    |

## Introduction

In December 1991, a group of 35 South Koreans instituted legal proceedings against the Japanese government. They demanded apologies of the Japanese for the suffering they had caused during the Second World War and claimed compensation for the victims. The group of South Koreans consisted of former soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army and their surviving relatives, but there were also three former "comfort women" involved: women who during the war were taken by the Japanese to the front-line where they were forced to prostitute themselves.

Until then, the Japanese government had denied any involvement in the recruitment of these women or in the management of the officers' clubs, for which, they declared, private individuals had been responsible. In the beginning of January 1992, however, documents were found from which it became clear that the former Imperial Army had been involved in the establishment and management of special army brothels.

All this happened on the eve of the visit of the Japanese prime minister, Mr Miyazawa, to South Korea. There were fierce anti-Japanese demonstrations in Seoul. While in South Korea, the prime minister formally offered his apologies and he promised investigations to bring all relevant facts out into the open. As far as possible compensations were concerned, he declared that he would await a court ruling.

In July 1992, the results of the Japanese investigations were made public. It was recognised that the government had been directly involved in the establishment of 'comfort houses', but it was said that no evidence had been found of people being forced to work there. The government still declared that no damages would be paid, for the reason that Japan and South Korea had agreed, in the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations (1965), to cancel all possibilities of claiming compensation. Further investigations were promised, however, into other measures that could be taken to compensate these women.

This incident was not the first time that there was upheaval in the relations between Japan and South Korea about "ghosts" from the past. In spite of the close economic ties and common interests of these two countries, the post-war relation between Japan and South Korea is marked by sudden outbursts of anti-Japanese feelings on the side of the Koreans. It is felt that Japan has still not sufficiently settled the accounts of 36 years of colonial rule.

During the colonial period (1910-1945), Korea was exploited mainly as a producer of rice and mineral resources but also as a market for products of Japanese industries and as a place for impoverished Japanese farmers to go to. As a result of this, the standard of living of the Koreans declined considerably. It is, however, the period after 1937 that is remembered most vividly by Koreans of the older generations and it is the memories of this period that still keep alive fierce feelings of resentment. It was after 1937, when Japan started the conquest of China proper (eventually leading to the war against the United States and its allies in 1942), that they started using Korea as "a forward logistical base" for Japanese expansion and as a store of human power of which there was a lack on the Japanese side. In order to

be able to serve the Japanese cause properly, the Koreans had to be re-educated into "Children of the Emperor". After 1937, the Government-General pursued a policy of "Japanisation": the use of the Korean language at schools was banned, and it was also tried to make older Koreans use the Japanese language. In 1938, there followed the decree that all Koreans had to change their names into Japanese (*sōshi kaimei*). The Japanese colonial government also tried to force upon the Koreans the state-*Shintō*. *Shintō* worship and loyalty to the emperor were one and the same thing under the concept of *kokutai* ('national polity').

After 1938, the Japanese started to fear a war against the Soviet Union, which made them decide to expand their army in Manchuria. The decision in 1940 to attack Indochina and other South Asian countries resulted in an enormous shortage of manpower. Furthermore, the demand for mineral and industrial products increased as the war front expanded. Japan started to 'recruit' Koreans for its armed forces or for factories and mines in Japan. What is more, large groups of Korean women were sent to different parts of the front in order to 'comfort' the Japanese soldiers. The Koreans, however, who in those ways suffered enormously for the Japanese cause lost their Japanese nationality after the war and could not appeal to the different laws that were introduced to financially support the war victims.

After the war (and after Korea gained independence), the Japanese leaders found it very hard to utter a single word of regret about the colonial period and the war. Only in 1965, when the relations between the two countries were normalised, the Japanese minister of foreign affairs expressed his "reflection" on the past, after which occasion, the Japanese leaders referred to the past only scantily. This changed after the "textbook controversy" of 1982, when great upheaval was caused in Japan as well as in China and Korea, by the news that the ministry of education had ordered the publishers to refer to the Japanese activities in northern China between 1935 and 1937 as "advance" (*shinshutsu*) rather than "aggression" (*shinryaku*). This incident grew into an enormous diplomatic problem and since that time, every Japanese prime minister faces the necessity of expressing to South Korea his "regret and reflection" about that "unhappy period in the past". They tend, however, to be vague about what that "unhappy past" exactly means. In the case of the comfort women, it took almost half a century before it was admitted that the army had indeed been involved.

The denial and extenuation of the Japanese aggression in the past, and the failure to pay compensation to the victims is sometimes referred to as "Japan's second sin", the first sin being Japan's militarism and imperialism. In this respect, the example is referred to of the Federal Republic of Germany, which has paid up till now more than DM 100 billion to the victims of national socialism, as part of the *Wiedergutmachung*. Another, more recent, example are the United States, which in 1985 paid US\$ 20,000 to Americans of Japanese origin who had been placed in internment camps during the Second World War.

The South Koreans are not the only ones claiming financial compensation from Japan. There are other countries in Asia where people still feel a deep distrust towards the Japanese, in spite of the admiration for their phenomenal economic power. Many people believe that Japan can only really start playing a political role in the world after it has settled its military and colonial past. The fact that after much turmoil, the bill

concerning limited participation in UN peace-keeping missions has been adopted, and that the first Japanese soldiers have set foot in Asia (in this case Cambodia) after more than 45 years, means on the one hand that Japan has met its international obligations. At the same time it also causes fears of Japan rising again as a military power.

In this essay, I will limit myself to the problems that exist between Japan and South Korea concerning "the post-war settlement" or "the settlement of the past". Of all Asian countries, South Korea is the most fierce in its criticism of the Japanese attitude. In spite of being so near geographically and in spite of the common cultural and historical background of both peoples, the Japanese generally have little respect and sympathy for the Koreans. The discrimination of Koreans living in Japan (who were often born and bred there) does not help much towards solving the problem of "the post-war settlement". The problems arising from the past first came to the surface in the form of diplomatic rows about words of apology from the emperor and "imprudent remarks" of Japanese politicians. In recent years, however, there have been several instances of legal action for compensation being taken by Korean war victims who were tired of being ignored for over forty years. They are supported in their cause by different Japanese organisations, because also in Japan, the call for "settlement of the past" is getting louder. The reaction of the Japanese government to the continuing claims from South Korea will establish a precedent for similar claims from other Asian countries.

Before I treat recent developments, I will discuss the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations (and the accompanying Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation), which has been used by the Japanese government for refuting claims from South Korea (chapter 1). Then I will discuss several unsolved issues: the Koreans that were recruited for the army and the war industry, the Korean war criminals, the Koreans that stayed behind at Sakhalin, the Korean victims of the atomic bombs and the former army prostitutes (chapter 2). Then we will consider how these matters developed after 1989, paying special attention to the death of emperor Shōwa (chapter 3), the visit of President Roh to Japan (chapter 4) and finally the issue of the "comfort women" (chapter 5).

On the basis of articles from newspapers and magazines, I will discuss the attitude of the Japanese government and the reactions upon this attitude from political parties, the press and "supporters of compensation".

## Chapter 1. The Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations and the Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation

In reaction to claims for compensation from South Korea, the Japanese government always refers to the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations (*NikKan Kihon Jōyaku*) and the accompanying Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation (*Seikyūken-Keizaikyōryoku Kyōtai*) of 1965. Until the present day, 27 years after they were signed, the Treaty and the Agreement still form a source of injustice and misunderstanding.

### 1.1. The Treaty on Basic Relations

Negotiations about the normalisation of relations between Japan and South Korea started in 1951, but at that time, the horrors of the colonial period (1910-1945) and the war were still remembered too vividly in South Korea to come to any sort of settlement with Japan. On the Japanese side, they refused to apologise for the past. One reason was that the Japanese leaders did not feel that Japan had done anything wrong ("the Japanese rule over Korea has helped the country to develop"), the other reason being the fear that an admission of guilt would lead to Korean claims for compensation.<sup>1</sup>

The personality of the South Korean president Mr Syngman Rhee (Lee Sung-man) did not make the negotiations any easier. He would not compromise in his aversion and distrust of the Japanese. The exploitation and humiliation of the Korean people was something Korea continually insisted upon during the negotiations. The Japanese side defended itself with the argument that Japan had never waged war against Korea and that it was therefore not obliged to pay reparations (*baishō*).

It took 14 years before the treaty was finally concluded. General Park Chung-hee had come to power in South Korea through a military coup, and he, as opposed to Rhee, had much admiration for the Japanese. South Korea was in an economic crisis and Park had great plans for the reconstruction of his country. For those plans, however, he needed the support of Japan. Japan, a country whose economy had completely recovered, was very eager to invest in South Korea. The time had come for the governments of the two countries to do business without those awkward references to the past. It is said that after General Park's military coup, a Japanese politician of the LDP (the governing Liberal Democratic Party) declared that "This is the time to haggle down the price"<sup>2</sup>. The whole process was facilitated by the fact that Park had established a dictatorial regime which could easily repress the voice of opposition from parliament and from the press.

In Japan, however, people had started to realise that, in order to prevent future problems, it was necessary to offer apologies.

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the differences in the interpretation of history between Japan and South Korea at the time of Syngman Rhee and the troublesome way to the normalisation of relations between the two countries: Lee, Chong-sik, *Japan and Korea; The political dimension*, 1985, pp. 22-42.

<sup>2</sup> Lee, p. 48.

In February 1965, the Minister of foreign affairs Shiina visited South Korea and declared: "That there has been an unfortunate period in the long history of relations between the two countries is highly regrettable, and I reflect upon it deeply"<sup>3</sup>. This was the first time that a Japanese dignitary apologised for the past. However, in the Treaty on Basic Relations itself, not a word is said about any responsibility of Japan for the suffering of the Koreans under Japanese rule. The only reference to the past is found in article 2 of the Treaty, which says:

"It is confirmed that all treaties or agreements concluded between the Empire of Japan and the Empire of Korea on or before August 22, 1910 are already null and void."<sup>4</sup>

In this article it is stated that the Japanese-Korean Annexation Treaty (*Heigō jōyaku*)<sup>5</sup>, which was signed on August 22, 1910 and which marked the beginning of 36 years of Japanese rule over the Korean peninsula, is void. The Japanese government interprets this article as meaning that the Annexation Treaty is not valid anymore and unlawful, but that it was valid according to international law at the time it was concluded. Prime minister Satō Eisaku (P.M. between 1964 and 1972) declared at the ratification of the Treaty on Basic Relations that the Annexation Treaty was concluded "on a basis of equality and by free will."<sup>6</sup> This statement was never revoked. It was, on the contrary, repeated by other dignitaries.<sup>7</sup> Many Koreans, who consider the whole colonial period as unlawful, took offence at this. Ōnuma Yasuaki says however: "International law originated in the period of western colonialism. (.....) The law does justify, in a sense, the balance of power. [The Japanese government assumed at the time of the Treaty on Basic Relations that] at that time (1910) all powerful countries were thieves, and thieves made the law (....). England, France, the United States, Germany and Russia were all thieves and they made the law, and therefore it

---

<sup>3</sup> Takasaki Sōji, "Watashitachi wa, wa, dono yō ni sengo o koete kita ka", *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> For the English and Japanese text of Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations and the Japanese version of the Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation: Kajima Heiwa Kenkyūjo (ed.), *Nihon Gaikō Shuyō Bunsho, Nempyō, Vol. 2 <1961-1970>*, Hara Shobō, 1983, pp. 569-586.

<sup>5</sup> For a short description of the conclusion of the Annexation Treaty: Rees, David, *A short history of modern Korea*, Ham Publishing, 1988, pp. 51-62.

<sup>6</sup> Takasaki, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> The Japanese Communist Party (*Nihon Kyōsantō*) calls, without success, for a withdrawal of this statement of Satō. See: *Asahi Shimbun*, May 18, 1990.

could not be said that the Japanese thieves were bad."<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the Annexation Treaty was valid according to international law, the problem is that the opinion of the Japanese government can be interpreted as follows: "The colonisation of Korea was lawful. All we did was follow the example of the western powers, so why should we apologise, let alone pay compensation."

In the normalisation talks between Japan and North Korea that have been taking place since 1991, the same questions (whether or not the Annexation Treaty was lawful and the right to reparation and compensation) play an important role. The Japanese side however uses the same arguments that were used in 1965.

Satō Takao remarks in this respect: "Of course there are until the present day no historical examples of European imperialistic powers offering their apologies for "colonial rule", (....) but would it not be a "contribution to the international community" if just Japan, the sole Asian colonial power, could, besides offering its apologies, take well-meant steps?"<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2. The Agreement

Each time the Japanese government is confronted with claims for compensation from either Korean ex-soldiers or ex-comfort women, the answer is:

"All rights of property and claim have been "sufficiently and definitely" settled in the Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation"<sup>10</sup>

In this agreement, Japan promised to give South Korea a grant-in-aid of US\$ 300 million in Japanese products and labour over a ten-year period (Article 1, 1a) and a US\$ 200 million government loan (Article 1, 1b). The real problem however is found in article 2, paragraph 1, which says:

"Both countries confirm that problems relating to the property, rights and profits of both countries and their citizens (including legal persons) as well as the rights of claim of both countries and their citizens, (....) have been settled completely and definitely (*kanzen katsu saishūteki ni kaiketsu sareta*)".

The name given to this agreement already indicates that for the Japanese side, it only applied to rights of claim that both countries had concerning *material property* in the other country. There was no reference to compensation for injustice suffered.

---

<sup>8</sup> Onuma Yasuaki, (University of Tokyo) in "Sengosekinin", *Hōritsu Jihō*, 61(9), August 1989, pp. 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> Satō Takao, "'Hoshō'e no shiten", *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> See: Kajima Heiwa Kenkyūjo, pp. 584-586.

Defenders of the South Korean claims furthermore point out that, although Japan and South Korea in this article forgo their rights to diplomatic protection in favour of their citizens, this does not say anything about the claims from individual persons.<sup>11</sup>

Japan and South Korea agreed that South Korea itself would deal with claims from its citizens, using the money provided by Japan. For that purpose, South Korea made two laws in the early seventies. However, due to the inadequate implementation of these laws, most war victims never received what they were entitled to. There was not enough publicity given to the possibility to get compensation, the period set for registration was too short and the whole procedure was too complicated. Compensation for relatives of soldiers killed was allocated on the basis of a list of names provided by the Japanese. Still, only a small number of them actually received any money. For the rest, people who had suffered damage to their property were compensated. Many other groups were not included in this arrangement: war casualties, forced labourers, victims of the atomic bombs, Koreans that stayed behind at Sakhalin, comfort women and Koreans living in Japan. Right from the moment the Treaty on Basic Relations was concluded, organisations in South Korea became active in providing support to the victims and in doing research into what had exactly happened.

The Japanese government as well as the South Korean government were led by economic motives when the Treaty on Basic Relations and the Agreement were concluded. It is obvious that Japan was not too eager to discuss the past, but the whole situation was made too easy for them by the willingness of the South Korean government to compromise. This means that the government of South Korea is, just like the Japanese government, responsible for the fact that the majority of the victims never received any compensation at all.

Another problem is that during the negotiations, the discussion had been about *baishō*, reparations that the defeated party in a war had to pay to the victors. Japan could easily refute claims from South Korea by arguing that, according to the Peace Treaty of San Francisco, South Korea could not claim any reparations from Japan for the reason that the two countries had never formally been at war with each other. Nowadays, when this problem is discussed, it is referred to as *hoshō*, "compensation", "damages" or "redress". The example of the Federal Republic of Germany is often quoted in this context. Although the arrangements that (former) West Germany made as part of the *Wiedergutmachung* are not perfect, the G.F.R. did, besides paying reparations to the allied nations, pay damages to the state of Israel (which did not even exist during the war!), to Jewish organisations and to individual victims of national socialism.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, Takasaki Sōji, "Watashitachi wa, dono yō ni sengo o koete kita ka", *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, p. 35

<sup>12</sup> See (for instance) the introduction by Herbst, Ludolf, to "Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland", in *Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Sondernummer, R. Oldenbourg Verlag München, 1989, pp. 7-31.

It must be said however that just after the war, enormous international pressure was exerted on Germany to pay reparations. That was not the case with Japan. The United States were opposed to reparation payments to South Korea because "as the occupation power that had financed Japan's rehabilitation and recovery, the funds would essentially have come from US taxpayers."<sup>13</sup>

"As a settlement of a 36 year period of colonial rule over Korea, the Treaty on Basic Relations is somewhat poor."<sup>14</sup> At the conclusion of the Treaty, there was no talk of "reflection" (*hansei*). Japan gave economic support to South Korea and South Korea used that opportunity in a highly effective way. Japan did however not give this economic support because of being sorry about what it had done in the past, but simply because it was an opportune thing to do anyway. South Korea prospered very much by the economic co-operation with Japan, but that was not a reason for Japan to say: "The past is finished" . For the victims of the Japanese colonial rule in any case, the past was not nearly over.

---

<sup>13</sup> Lee, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Utsumi Aiko in "Sengo Sekinin", *Hōritsu Jihō*, (61)9, p.16.

## 2. The inheritance of the past

After the war, the Koreans lost the Japanese nationality. Many groups of Koreans could not make any claims to the Japanese support laws (most of which included a nationality clause): those who had (often involuntarily) fought with the Japanese, those who had (often involuntarily) done slave labour in the mines and factories for the Japanese war industry, and the Women Volunteers (who did often not go voluntarily either). As a result of the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations, their position became even worse. In the past few years, some of them have instituted legal proceedings against the Japanese government, in which they request compensation for their suffering during and after the war. In the present chapter I will discuss each of these issues separately.

### 2.1. The recruitment of Koreans

From 1938 onwards, Japan started to 'recruit' Koreans for the army, the mines and the war industry at home.

In April 1938, the Special Volunteer Enlistment System became effective, but only 406 Koreans enlisted in the army. In 1943, when the war against the United States had just started, the Universal Draft System was implemented and 6,300 Koreans joined the army or the navy. At the end of the Second World War, there were 186,680 Koreans in the army and 22,299 in the Navy<sup>1</sup>. Many of them enlisted voluntarily or 'semi-voluntarily' (they did not have much choice), others were taken away with violence. They were deployed everywhere on the Japanese fronts. Just like their Japanese fellow soldiers they got injured or killed but in their cases, relatives were not informed. Also they were excluded from health insurance and pension schemes. Far larger in scale than the recruitment for the army was the recruitment for work in Japanese factories and mines and for projects on navy bases in the Pacific. Exact figures are not known, but estimations range from 700,000 to 1.5 million Korean forced labourers. The number increased as the war efforts grew. At first<sup>2</sup>, Japanese companies had permission (granted in September 1939) to recruit workers for themselves in Korea. Contracts were offered for a period of two years, but after that period was finished, the companies made great efforts to persuade the Koreans to renew their contracts. They were supported in this by the Japanese government (the ministry of welfare). In November 1941, the workers' freedom of movement was put to an end. All that was not enough however to provide a supply of labour large enough for Japan's need and after the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Government-General of Korea became directly involved in the recruitment of Koreans. This was still not enough and therefore, starting from 1944, besides the so-called *kan'assen* (official mediation), the system of *Kokumin Chōyōtaisei* (National Compulsory Labour Mobilisation)

---

<sup>1</sup> Figures from Lee, op. cit. p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> For the legislation on the recruitment of Korean labourers: Tanaka Hiroshi, "Naze Nihon wa kako no seisan o nigeru no ka?", *Ekonomisuto*, August 21 1990, pp. 48-51.

was implemented.

The circumstances in which the Koreans in Japan had to live and work were very poor. As Koreans, they were discriminated against and mistreated and they were considered simply as workhorses. There was a lack of proper food and accommodation. Many of them escaped or at least made attempts to do so, others became ill or got injured during their heavy work.

Shortly after the war, the Federation of Korean Residents in Japan<sup>1</sup>, the *Zainichi Chōsenjin Renmei* demanded the following: 1) full information about workers who had been abducted from Korea; 2) damages for those who died; and 3) payment to the Federation of back wages owed to workers who either had escaped or had been sent back to Korea because of illness or who had died. The Japanese government and business community realised that they had to agree to the first one of the demands. But the second and third ones were firmly rejected, using the arguments that firstly, these demands ran counter to a regulation of the ministry of welfare (which prohibited discrimination between Japanese workers and workers from the colonies) and that secondly, the Federation could not be considered a representative of the Koreans within the meaning of the Japanese Civil Code<sup>4</sup>.

They expected much protest against the decision and the *Naimushō* (ministry of home affairs, afterwards abolished by the Americans) issued directions to the heads of municipal and prefectural police headquarters insisting on hard action against rioting Koreans. It galled many Japanese to see the Koreans, who considered themselves a liberated and victorious people, express their joy at the defeat of Japan rather noisily. It was therefore not surprising that clashes did occur. Regarding the demand for payment of back wages however, more was needed than a reinforcement of the police force. A deposit bank was established, to which companies could pay the back wages.

At the conclusion of the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations, both countries agreed to forgo their rights of claim. As a result, the money deposited with the deposit bank was confiscated by Japan. Furthermore, the Japanese government considered it no longer necessary to continue the research into the lists of names of Korean labourers. Therefore, it became more difficult for the Koreans to find out about what had happened to missing relatives.

On October 29, 1990, the South Korean *Taiheiyō sensō giseisha izokukai* (Association of victims and bereaved families of the Pacific War) for the first time filed a lawsuit, demanding the following: 1) apologies for what Japan had done before and after the war; 2) a confirmation of the obligation to pay damages; and 3) an inquiry into the real facts of the *kyōsei renkō* ('to take away involuntarily', in German 'Verschleppung').

The group of claimants consisted, besides former soldiers and surviving relatives, of former forced labourers. Among them

---

<sup>1</sup> Before the war there were already many Koreans living in Japan who had gone there to work, and after the war, for whatever reason, many of them opted for staying in Japan. Two million of them were repatriated.

<sup>4</sup> See: Koshō Tadashi, "Chōsenjin kyōsei renkō meibo chōsa wa naze susmanai ka?" in *Sekai* September 1991, p. 108.

were people who did not even know whether their father or brother had been killed at a battle field or had died while working in a mine or a factory or whether the missing person might still be alive. The *Izokukai* said it would start more lawsuits like that<sup>5</sup>, which it did do, for instance on December 6, 1991. On that occasion, there were among the claimants, besides (surviving relatives of) soldiers and forced labourers, 3 comfort women.

Less than a week after that, a group of South Koreans put forward a new claim: they had to be paid the same kind of compensation as Japanese war victims and they also had to be offered "sincere apologies". It was argued that Japan was obliged to "ease the feelings of the surviving relatives by taking steps such as to give back the mortal remains".<sup>6</sup>

## 2.2. Korean war criminals

After the war, 148 of the Korean soldiers who had been involved in guarding allied prisoners of war were sentenced, as war criminals class BC (*BCKyū Sempān*), to punishments ranging from a few years in prison to the death penalty.

On November 12, 1991, seven of them (including the son of one who had been sentenced to death by the Dutch temporary court-martial) filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government, demanding apologies and compensation of a total amount of 136 million Yen. They all had served their time but now they demanded apologies and compensation because they had been the ones to "bear the Japanese war guilt". This is the first instance of war criminals filing a lawsuit, in which questions are asked about the responsibility for the war itself.<sup>7</sup>

The claimants had spent the first years of their prison sentence in jails in Singapore and Jakarta, but later they were handed over to Japan. They lost their Japanese nationality after Japan's defeat and they argue that it was unfair that they had to serve their prison sentence in the same country which, having rounded them up at a young age, simply threw them away afterwards.

It is said that the Koreans in the Japanese army were more cruel than the Japanese themselves. That cruelty, it is suggested, had to do with the fact that they found themselves in a position all at the bottom of the army hierarchy. In the verdicts of the allied law courts, those people were questioned about their individual responsibility.<sup>8</sup> Why hadn't they refused to obey certain orders and why hadn't they refused to let people work under extremely severe circumstances, as happened for

---

5

*Asahi Shimbun*, *Shukusatsuban* (reduced-size edition), October 29, 1990.

6

*Asahi Shimbun*, December 13, 1991

7

*Asahi Shimbun*, November 13, 1991.

8

For a description of the whole case: Imamura Tsuguo, "Chōsen minzoku keizokuka no rekishi o sabaku", in *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 28-32.

i instance at the Burma railway? But, Imamura Tsuguo, lawyer and member of the *Nihon no sensō sekinin wo katagawari saserareta Kankoku-Chōsenjin BCkyū sempan o sasearu kai* ("The association for the support of North- and South Korean war criminals class BC, who had had to bear the Japanese war guilt") defended them with the following: "They were around twenty years old at that time and they were all at the bottom of the hierarchy, and as guards, they had absolutely nothing to say about food or medicine. The only thing they did was to accompany war prisoners to their place of work and to oversee them (....)."<sup>9</sup> They had been completely indoctrinated and disobedience was severely punished. Imamura goes on to argue that what this process is really about is the guilt of the Japanese imperial system itself.

It is obviously a very complicated issue since what is indirectly also challenged is the justice of the allied war tribunals ("the revenge of the victors" as some Japanese still call it).

### 2.3. The Koreans that stayed behind at Sakhalin

A special group among the Korean workers are those who were taken to Sakhalin (formerly Karafuto) and who were left there after the war, the so-called *Saharin Zanryū Chōsenjin*. Around 1944, there were approximately 60,000 Koreans at Sakhalin, who were set to work in the mines and in military factories. Twenty thousand of them were transferred to Hokkaido just before the end of the war, but after the war, there were still 300,000 Japanese and 43,000 Koreans at Sakhalin, which at that time had been occupied by the Soviet Union.

After the war, the *rusukazoku* ('absent families') made efforts for the return of their Japanese sons and/or husbands. The Koreans, however, were forgotten. In December 1946, the United States and the U.S.S.R. concluded a treaty concerning the repatriation of people in Russian territories: this meant that 292,590 Japanese could return home. In October 1956, as a result of a Japanese-Russian joint communiqué, a group of 'Japanese wives' (the so-called *Nihonjinfu*) were repatriated, together with their Korean husbands and their children (2,307 people in all, 700 of whom Koreans). After that, more people were repatriated on an individual basis. A few hundred Japanese stayed behind, but out of the 43,000 Koreans, only some 1,000 did return to Korea. The rest of them had to live their lives separated from their relatives and from their country (almost half of them originally coming from the south of Korea). According to Takagi Ken'ichi, a lawyer, not only the United States and the U.S.S.R. are to blame for this situation but also Japan.<sup>10</sup>

From 1960 to the mid-seventies, it was Soviet policy to let people return if Japan would let them in. Japan however was only

---

9

Imamura Tsuguo, "Chōsen minzoku keizokuka no rekishi o sabaku", in *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, p. 30.

10

Takagi Ken'ichi, "Nao ubawaretsuzuketa kokyō to kazoku", *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, p. 63.

willing to serve as a transit area and South Korea had to pay the expenses. There have been instances of repatriations failing to take place as a result of slow Japanese bureaucracy. An example of this is the case of 4 Koreans who lost their permit to leave the U.S.S.R. because Japan was too slow in granting the necessary permission to enter the country.

After 1976, it was considered an 'anti-Soviet' sentiment to even say that one wanted to leave. And in Japan it was thought, according to Takagi, that it was not sensible to let people from a socialist state return to South Korea, which was a dictatorial state<sup>11</sup>. In the years after that, people who wished to return to South Korea did, in order not to be considered 'anti-Soviet', refrain from using terms such as *yokuryū* ('detention') and *okisari* ('left behind'). Since then the term *zanryū* ('stayed behind') is used. They argued that the problem of the *zanryū Chōsenjin* ('the Koreans who stayed behind') was in the first place a humanitarian issue which had nothing to do with politics. The arrival of Gorbachev and his Perestroika made the gap between east and west smaller, which made it easier for Koreans to travel to Korea and to visit relatives.

In Japan, people started to pay more attention to this issue and in 1987, MP's of the LDP and the Social Democratic Party of Japan set up a joint commission which lobbied intensively in the Japanese and Soviet governments (*Saharin zanryū Kankoku-Chōsenjin mondai giikondankai* or

'the discussion group of Diet members on the question of North and South Koreans who stayed behind at Sakhalin'). The activities of this commission and of the citizens' groups from Japan and South Korea started to have some effect. The U.S.S.R. began to let older Koreans return permanently (40 people in 1989). The expenses of visiting relatives and of returning permanently are high and since 1987, the Japanese government reserves money to help people in that situation. In August 1989, the South Korean Democratic Party decided to claim compensation of the Japanese government and within the same month, the South Korean government announced that it would ask the Japanese government to share in the expenses of repatriation so that the whole process could be accelerated. In May 1990, both emperor Akihito and prime minister Kaifu offered their apologies to South Korea for "the unhappy past" (see chapter 5). The fact that on this occasion, Japan for the first time "recognised the liability for the unlawful deed of colonial rule" was the starting signal for a few South Korean and Japanese lawyers to form a collective and to start a search for Koreans who were willing to go to court.<sup>12</sup> Those people were found and on August 29, 1990, exactly 80 years after the annexation of Korea, a group of North- and South Koreans instituted legal proceedings against the Japanese government, in which they 'investigate' the 'post-war responsibility' of Japan. Most of the claimants were still at Sakhalin, two of them lived in South Korea. One of those two was the chairman of the *Chū-So Risankazokukai* ("Association of families dispersed over China and the Soviet Union"), who was the son of a worker that died at

---

<sup>11</sup> Ken'ichi, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, May 25, 1990.

Sakhalin. The other was a woman that had lived separated from her husband for almost 50 years. They all claim compensation for 50 years of suffering and they hope that their dream will be realised: re-union with relatives and a final solution of the whole problem.<sup>13</sup>

#### 2.4. The South Korean victims of the atomic bombs

After the war, laws were made to provide financial support to war victims. These laws however only applied to former soldiers and their surviving relatives. Furthermore, they all included a nationality clause. Exceptions to this were the two laws concerning support for survivors of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: the *Genshibakudanhikakusha no iryō ni kansuru hōritsu* ("law concerning medical treatment of atomic bomb victims") and the *Genshibakudanhikakusha ni taisuru tokubetsu sochi ni kansuru hōritsu* ("law concerning special measures for atomic bomb victims"), both of May 1968.<sup>14</sup> These two laws did not include a nationality clause. Still, many Koreans, most of them labourers who were forced to work at the shipyards of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were not able to receive treatment for radiation sickness, as a result of which they died after many years of suffering.

The *Gembaku iryōhō* of 1957 implied that people holding a 'victim's pass' (*higaisha techō*) could receive treatment at the expense of the Japanese state. People however who needed a special visa in order to get hold of one of those *techō* were not given a visa for that purpose. Koreans who crossed over to Japan on a tourist visa did not qualify for specialist treatment. Moreover, it was at that time difficult to get permission to leave South Korea anyway.

Son Chin-dou<sup>15</sup> entered the country illegally in 1970 (following the example of his sister who had vainly tried to do this in 1968) but he met with a wall of indifference. Son therefore started legal action and after 8 years, in March 1978, the Supreme Court complied with his request and he received the *techō* he had wanted so much. In the court's verdict it was recognised for the first time that the Japanese state was responsible for the war towards the victims of the atomic bombs living in South Korea. Now for the first time a clear statement was made about

---

<sup>13</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, *Shukusatsuban*, August 29 1990 (evening edition). In 1992, documents were found which prove that, although G.H.Q. had concrete plans to repatriate Koreans originally from the Korean peninsula south of the 38th parallel, the US army was against people from Sakhalin returning because of Korea not being strong enough economically to deal with that problem. It was expected that this would have had a "subtle" influence on the process. *Asahi Shimbun*, May 5, 1992.

<sup>14</sup> Tanaka Hiroshi, "Nihon no kyūshokuminchi shussshinsha to sengo hoshō", *Hōritsu Jihō*, 61(9), August 1989, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup>

For the story of Son: Nakajima Tatsumi, "Kokuseki no kabe o kowasu naigai no rentai o", *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 38-42.

the responsibility of the state for the damage caused by the atomic bombs, which forced the Japanese government to review its policy.<sup>16</sup> Also as a result of this verdict, a discussion group was set up consisting of members of the governing parties of the two countries.

From that time onwards, South Koreans suffering of radiation sickness were given the opportunity to go to Japan for a treatment of two months, Japan paying the costs of medical treatment and accommodation and South Korea paying the travel expenses. The *toNichi chiryo* ('going to Japan for treatment') started in 1981, but out of the estimated 20,000 Korean victims, only 348 have been treated until now (the end of 1991).

The "Association of South Korean victims of the atomic bomb" (*Kankoku gembakuhigaisha kyōkai*), which until then had asked mainly for medical support, transformed itself into a pressure-group for compensation. In 1987, they demanded US\$ 2.3 billion, which case turned into a political problem between Japan and South Korea. Secret negotiations were held and in 1989 it came out that there were talks going on about establishing a social fund.

During the visit in May 1990 of president Roh to Japan, prime minister Kaifu offered his apologies and announced the plan for a relief fund of Y. 4 billion. This fund would have to cover part of the expenses of treatment in South Korea itself. It could not be considered proper compensation for the injustice done to the Korean victims, who had been ignored for such a long time. It is true that the efforts of the Korean victims had produced some result but their original claim for compensation was still standing.

## 2.5. The comfort women

One aspect of the Japanese reign of terror in Korea has remained neglected for a long time. The *Jūgun ianfu*, 'the comfort women that follow the army' (a phrase which, although a terrible euphemism, is constantly used in the Japanese press), who were either allured under false pretences or who were simply abducted, could after the war not easily talk about their experiences. Because of the social stigmas involved, hardly anything was known for a long time about the existence of brothels set up and managed by the army. As a result of democratisation and the growth of the women's movement in Korea, women came forward to break the silence.

When emperor Hirohito died, demonstrations were held by the Federation of women's organisations (*Joseidantairengō*) against the South Korean prime minister Kang going to the emperor's funeral. They called for "apologies of Japan to the people of South Korea for all the crimes that Japan committed during the period of militarism, such as the Women Volunteers Corps."<sup>17</sup> This demonstration did not have much effect, but in June 1990, Motooka Shōji, a SDP member of the Upper House, asked questions about the comfort women during a meeting of the budget committee. Shimizu, head of the Employment Security Bureau (*Shokugyō antei kyoku*) of

---

<sup>16</sup> Nakajima, p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, *Shukusatsuban*, February 23, 1989.

the ministry of labour answered at that time: "Regarding the comfort women of the army, it appears that it was private business people (*minkan gyōsha*) who took those women to the front, but I cannot say that we did any research into that matter and that we will come up with any results."<sup>18</sup> The question was brought up by the SDP on other occasions during different commission meetings. Still, the government would not change its opinion that the women had been recruited by private individuals and that the army had had, besides being customer, nothing to do with the brothels, which meant that it was not necessary to start any investigation. The government persisted, even when in August 1991 a former comfort woman came to Japan to tell her story and when she, together with two other women, in December started a lawsuit against the government. In January 1992 however, the Japanese professor Yoshimi Yoshiaki dug up documents which proved that it had been the army that recruited the women and that managed brothels.<sup>19</sup>

When it became more evident that Japan was going to be defeated, the army was ordered to destroy any incriminating material. This made investigations into the number of army prostitutes and their circumstances more difficult (which, for that matter, also goes for the forced labourers). In spite of this, there is still sufficient evidence available. Estimations range from 70,000 to 200,000 Korean women, but it is very well possible that in the figure of 200,000, there were also included the women who worked in the Japanese munitions- and army equipment factories (another source of confusion is the fact that Koreans refer to the comfort women as *Teishintai*, 'Volunteers Corps'). Not all the women in the army brothels, for that matter, were Koreans. There were also women from Japan (most of whom had been working as prostitutes before) as well as Philippine, Taiwanese, Indonesian and Dutch women (the latter group being relatively small<sup>20</sup>).

Another thing that is unclear is when the Japanese army first started setting up special army brothels. According to Satō Katsumi<sup>21</sup>, the idea originated after the Siberian Expedition (1918-1922). When it turned out that many soldiers had contracted venereal diseases in Russia, the plan was conceived to set up special brothels with strict regulations on hygiene, in order to prevent the soldiers from getting ill. The first brothel started business in Shanghai (after the Shanghai incident, January 1932). This one was owned by civilians, but it was open to soldiers only. The idea behind it was to 'give' the women to the soldiers

---

<sup>18</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, January 4, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, January 11, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> NRC, July 25, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> Satō Katsumi, "Shazai suru hodo waruku naru Nikkan kankei", *Bungei Shunjū*, March 1992, p. 141.

in order to 'comfort' them and to check their aggression.<sup>22</sup>

The first brothel directly managed by the army was set up in 1938 and from then onwards, this system expanded rapidly. The immediate cause of this was the 'Rape of Nanking' (December 1937). The brothels were established with the intention to prevent the rape of local women and in that way to limit anti-Japanese feelings: in other words, to restore order in occupied territories.

Suzuki Yūko<sup>23</sup> writes that the whole system of the Japanese army, because of the fundamental inequality among the soldiers themselves and the low morale, was so "rotten" that women had to be used to keep the soldiers under control. Korean women ("still young and pure") were preferred over the "experienced" Japanese prostitutes. But more than order problems, it seems that the fear of venereal diseases was the main reason for establishing the brothels. Hygiene was of prime importance. Soldiers received a condom upon entering and the women were regularly checked by an army medical officer. ("We were a hygienic public toilet.")

The army was directly involved in all aspects of the management of the brothels: renting or confiscation of the buildings; the supply of materials; the necessities for the women; the guarding; the rules (entrance fee, the duration of the visit, hygienic regulations) - in short, everything.

In 1992, the Japanese government was reluctant to admit that the women had been forced into prostitution, but there are several testimonies from which it becomes clear that this was the case. A former soldier describes how he went to a Korean village with a group of other soldiers to fetch some women. Under heavy resistance, 8 women were dragged into the lorry, and they were raped even before they arrived in the army camp.<sup>24</sup> From testimonies of former *ianfu* themselves<sup>25</sup> we know how they were taken, threatened with bayonets, from their houses or from where they worked. In other cases they were promised a job as a nurse or as a factory worker, but once they had arrived, it turned out to be a brothel, and at that stage there was no way left to escape. One woman became a volunteer with the "Patriots' Corps" in order to get her father released, who was in prison for refusing to take on a Japanese name. She was sent to Jakarta (and sterilised while on her way there). The women followed the army everywhere in Asia and the Pacific (which explains the word *jūgunianfu*, 'comfort women that follow the army'). But when the situation of the Japanese army became more and more hopeless, the women were often killed or left behind. Many of them also were killed by American missiles. A sad example is this story from a

---

22

Satō Kazuhide, "Nihon rikugun ga setchi shita 'jūgun ianfu' no shinsō", *Shio*, March 1992, p. 171.

23

Suzuki Yūko, "Shōwashi no saianbu", *Sekai*, September 1991, pp. 101-107.

<sup>24</sup> Yoshida Seiji, who published '*Watashi no sensō hanzai*' in 1983. From: Suzuki, p. 106.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance: *Mainichi Shimbun*, August 1, 1992.

former soldier: at the time of the retreat from Rabaul (Bismarck Archipelago), the comfort women were put into a submarine and sent out into the sea which was then full of mines of the allied forces. Japanese sailors left the vessel just before it was launched.<sup>26</sup>

Those who survived were interned by the Americans and at a later stage repatriated. Many of them did not dare to go back to their families because of the disgrace. Some of them were repudiated by their husbands, sometimes because they could not have children anymore.

War and extreme cruelty go hand in hand. Any army from any country has at some stage been guilty of pointless violence which had nothing to do with "ordinary" war action. Every nation has periods in its history which it would rather forget about. But in the case of Japan, the repression of the past has gone much further than usual. This has consequences for the relations with the other countries in Asia, particularly South Korea. The stronger Japan gets economically, the louder the call from South Korea becomes for a "settlement of the past" (*Kako no seisan*). Especially in the period after the death of emperor Hirohito, there have been more and more calls for apologies and claims for compensation.

### 3. The end of the Shōwa era

The death of emperor Hirohito and the discussion that ensued did not have any direct influence on the relation between Japan and South Korea. The event does however give an interesting insight into Japan's perception of the past and into Japan's relations with its neighbouring countries. I will use the death of Hirohito therefore as the starting point of the rest of this essay.

The death of Hirohito meant the end of the Shōwa era (1926-January 7, 1989), a turbulent period in Japan's history. The Second World War, the defeat, the miraculous economic recovery followed by unequalled economic expansion, it all happened in Hirohito's life time. Under the Meiji Constitution, the emperor had absolute power: he was commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the source of all authority and the father of the Japanese family. After the defeat, the new democratic constitution imposed by the Americans reduced him to a merely symbolical function. But for all the neighbouring countries and for the western nations that had been at war with Japan, his person remained closely associated with the atrocities of the past. Both at home and abroad, there were discussions about the question to what extent the emperor had been directly responsible for the war. Many victims of Japanese militarism in the east and west saw Hirohito as a war criminal who should have been tried. Former English prisoners of war and Dutch civilians who had been interned caused enormous upheaval about who should go to the funeral of Hirohito. South Korean women protested against the fact that their prime minister did go.

The Japanese press was full of articles about Hirohito's person, about his role in the war etc., but, as Ōnuma Yasuaki (an activist in different citizens' groups) was to remark later<sup>1</sup>, the Japanese failed to ask themselves what their own responsibility was. They may, as individuals, not have been directly guilty of what had happened, but what did they think of the past and what was their attitude towards the countries in Asia, particularly towards China and Korea, that had suffered most under the Japanese aggression?

There is much wrong in general with the Japanese conception of history. Young Japanese are not much interested, but that is true for young people anywhere in the world. Older Japanese think of the hardships that they themselves had to suffer during and after the war. The terrible experience of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki has made the Japanese consider themselves in the first place as victims. The general idea is: we have become so powerful economically. All those countries complaining about the past only want money from us. We give them economic support, so what else can they ask?

This attitude shows that the government has failed in educating the people. The past is glossed over and ignored. As a result, many Japanese do not understand the war and fail to appreciate the grievances of people from the rest of Asia. Of course there are exceptions. Scientists, politicians and people whose own individual experiences have made them more aware of how the victims of Japanese aggression feel about the past, and who

---

<sup>1</sup>  
In: "Sengo sekinin", *Hōritsu Jihō*, 61(9), August 1989, p. 6.

do their best to perceive their country's history correctly.

The government however seems to respond only to criticism from abroad. Many times, politicians have been reprimanded for saying wrong things about the war, but each time again one of them manages to say something to prove his lack of historical insight and sensitivity. For instance the incident, just after the death of the emperor, involving the then prime minister Takeshita Noboru (1987-June 1989).

During the plenary session of the Diet on February 14, 1989, Kaneko, MP of the Japan Communist Party (JCP), asked questions about the specific responsibility of the emperor. The JCP has always been opposed against the imperial system. The party objected against the *taishō-no-rei*, the state funeral of Hirohito. He had been, after all, a mere symbol without any political power.

Takeshita had said after the emperor's death that the war had started against the will of the emperor. "But," Kaneko wanted to know, "by whom has it been decided then to wage war? Who had the authority to declare war? And, do you think that the war was one of aggression? Where lies the responsibility?"<sup>2</sup>

The answer of prime minister Takeshita was:

"In my speech on the occasion of the death of His Highness, I did not at all think about who was responsible. (.....)

The question whether it was a war of aggression must be left to a later generation of historians."

During a meeting of the budget committee a few days later, the vice-chairman of the JCP, Fuwa Tetsuzō, asked the prime minister what exactly he had meant by his statement. The prime minister answered: "Acts of aggression have been committed, but to consider the whole war as one of aggression is problematic from a scientific point of view."<sup>4</sup>

A storm of protest broke loose from all countries in the world. First of all China, South Korea, the Soviet Union and Italy protested against this "falsification of history". The Japanese government also distanced itself from prime minister Takeshita's statements. The foreign minister, Uno, declared that the prime minister was probably aware of the government's position on this issue, but that he had simply made a slip of the tongue<sup>5</sup>. According to a member of the Takeshita faction, part of the text of the prime minister's speech had accidentally been left out.<sup>6</sup>

The Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDP, formerly the Japan Socialist Party) demanded a retraction of the statements, apologies to all countries involved and a formal declaration of

---

2

*Asahi Shimbun, Shukusatsuban, February 15, 1989.*

3

*Asahi Shimbun, Shukusatsuban, February 15, 1989.*

<sup>4</sup> *Asahi Shimbun, February 19, 1989 (day edition)*

5

*Asahi Shimbun, Shukusatsuban, February 19, 1989 (day edition).*

6

*Asahi Shimbun, February 22, 1989 (day edition).*

the prime minister recognising the fact of aggression. The SDP accused the prime minister of denying the Japanese aggression against China, Korea and other countries with the aim of reviving Japanese militarism.<sup>7</sup>

The Japanese government had decided by then to let diplomats set matters right.

After the funeral ceremony on February 24, prime minister Takeshita had a meeting with prime minister Kang of South Korea. The latter did not say a word about the awkward remarks of Takeshita, but that was, according to the Japanese ministry of foreign affairs, because of Confucianist ethics not allowing one to discuss such indelicate matters at a funeral. It did not mean that people in South Korea simply took Takeshita's statements for granted<sup>8</sup>. Takeshita said to prime minister Kang: "We just want to continue the friendly relation with South Korea." And that was it.

*Asahi Shimbun* wrote as a comment: "The Shōwa era may be over now, but we must not forget to reflect on the past."<sup>9</sup>

Towards the end of February, prime minister Takeshita retracted his words. During a budget committee meeting on February 27, he explained: "I think that it was a slip of the tongue and I am sorry that it led to critical reactions from abroad". He acknowledged that there had been no change in the position of the government and he read from a piece of paper: "1) It is a fact that through the war, Japan has in the past caused serious damage to the people of its neighbouring countries; 2) We cannot deny that these deeds were aggressive; 3) Very much aware of this, our country has again decided on peace and it will, as a peaceful nation, contribute to peace and stability in the world, so that these things will not happen a second time."<sup>10</sup> When SDP member Uehara again asked "Do you recognise that it was a war of aggression?", the prime minister failed to give a clear answer. Not only abroad but also in Japan the words of the prime minister had aroused much aversion. People understood that a statement like that was really unacceptable. Comments were made however which still make us doubtful about the historical awareness of Japanese politicians. Take for instance the words of the first cabinet secretary Kobuchi: "We must be sufficiently aware that we have been severely criticised about the war being, internationally speaking, aggressive,"<sup>11</sup> which meant that he left the judgement to others. The weak excuses of other politicians ("part of his text had been left out") also make one wonder about their understanding of history.

---

7

*Asahi Shimbun*, February 24, 1989 (day edition).

8

*Asahi Shimbun*, February 25, 1989 (evening edition).

<sup>9</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, February 27, 1989 (evening edition)

<sup>10</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, February 27, 1989 (evening edition)

<sup>11</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, *Shukusatsuban*, February 21, 1989 (evening edition).

A month later (on March 30), during a meeting of the budget committee, the prime minister offered his apologies to the Korean peninsula:

"We must forever keep engraved in our hearts our awareness of and reflection on the past actions of Japan towards the Korean peninsula, which is most near to us, historically and geographically. (.....) I again want to express to all the people in that area my deep reflection and regret about our earlier relations"<sup>12</sup>

This was something new, because until then, the Northern half of the peninsula had never been mentioned in Japanese expressions of regret. The prime minister did this because he hoped to effect an improvement of the relations with North Korea and to start negotiations with that country on government level.

This incident shows in my opinion how quickly things can change. Shortly after imprudent and dangerous statements, there again followed words of regret. The expressions of regret were politically motivated and had nothing to do with historical awareness. Because most Japanese leaders seem to lack any historical awareness, or rather because their awareness of history differs from ideas in their neighbouring countries and the rest of the world, their apologies (*shazai*) are received with some scepticism. Their words of apology are, moreover, not followed by any actions to express their feelings of regret. Therefore, South Korea again asked for apologies a year later, and this time from the emperor himself.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, March 30, 1989 (evening edition).

#### 4. The visit of president Roh to Japan

In May 1990 president Roh Tae-woo of South Korea visited Japan. He was the first democratically elected president of the country and the second South Korean president to visit Japan officially. His coming was meant to mark the beginning of a "new era" in the relations between Japan and South Korea. The two countries together were to form the axis of a new form of co-operation between the Asian countries. The visit however became dominated by the past. Issues such as the South Korean victims of the atomic bombs, the Koreans at Sakhalin and the legal status of Koreans in Japan had still not been settled satisfactorily. At the official announcement of Roh's visit, the Japanese government was given to understand that South Korea was expecting emperor Akihito to personally offer his apologies for what Japan had done to Korea before and during the war.

Emperor Hirohito had, during the visit of president Chun Doo-wan in 1984, expressed his "regret" (*ikan no i*) about the "unhappy past" (*fukō na kako*)<sup>1</sup>. That was far too vague, many South Koreans thought, because it had not been clearly stated who had caused this "unhappy past" and what exactly had happened. Furthermore, it was said, to express one's "regret" was not quite the same as to apologise.

The fact that the Koreans were still waiting for Japan to say more on this issue led to the *o-kotoba mondai* ('the question of the words of the emperor'), as the whole problem came to be referred to.

The Korean minister of foreign affairs, Choi (Ch'oe), said at a meeting with Japanese journalists that he expected a statement similar to the one made by the Japanese foreign minister a few weeks earlier.

In answer to a question of a SDP member, Sentani, minister Nakayama said:

"I am aware that the Pacific War [was caused] by the aggression of militarist Japan, which has done great damage to the neighbouring countries and their people. Assuming that there is resentment in the hearts of those people, we must, in order to remove that resentment, reflect humbly and from the deepest of our hearts on that sad aggression of the past. (.....) If we want to turn over a new page, we must make efforts together with the people of South Korea. Meanwhile, we must not cease to look back upon the past and to think about history, which cannot be wiped out and

---

<sup>1</sup> Prime minister Nakasone said at that occasion: "The fact remains that there was a period in this century when Japan brought to bear great sufferings upon your country and its people. I would like to state here that the government and people of Japan feel a deep regret for this error and are determined to firmly warn ourselves for the future." Quotation from: Lee, p. 166. President Chun repeatedly referred to this visit as the beginning of a "new era of partnership" between the two countries.

which we have made ourselves."<sup>2</sup>

From the mouth of a cabinet minister, this was a rather direct statement. But a cabinet minister is not the same as an emperor. The Japanese government was of the opinion that the emperor could not make any "political" statements. "The emperor shall be the symbol of the state" (Japanese Constitution, article 1), and his words and deeds in public are subject to strict constitutional limitations. Prime minister Kaifu (August 1989-1991) was considered the most suitable person to offer his apologies, being the highest representative of the government. He indicated that he would, during his meeting with the South Korean president, make statements "more profound" (*yori fumikonda*) than the emperor would do.

The political parties were of the opinion that the emperor could not be used for political purposes. That had happened in the past, with the well-known results. The SDP proposed a plan to pass a parliamentary resolution in which parliament, as the highest representative of state power, would offer its apologies to the whole of Asia.<sup>3</sup> "The moral values of the Japanese people cannot be realised by forgetting [the war]." None of the other parties reacted positively, except the Shaminren (Social Democratic Federation). The LDP was of the opinion that diplomacy was the prerogative of the government, not of parliament, and that therefore a diplomatic issue should not be dealt with in a parliamentary resolution. The Kōmeitō (Clean Government Party) and the Minshatō (Democratic Socialist Party) blamed the SDP for having "leaned" towards North Korea for a long time and for not having recognised the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations.<sup>4</sup>

The situation threatened to escalate when an important LDP member remarked angrily: "It is just because we do reflect on the colonial period and the aggressive war that we co-operate [with Korea]. Do we need to bow any deeper?"<sup>5</sup> He referred to the US\$ 4 billion government loan of Japan to South Korea (in 1984, before the visit of president Chun).

Wide publicity was given in South Korea to this "imprudent remark". A South Korean government official again emphasised: "The emperor is directly linked to the history of both countries

---

<sup>2</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, *Shukusatsuban*, April 26, 1990 (evening edition).

<sup>3</sup> It was not the first time that the (then) party chairman Doi Takako put forward a plan like that. In August 1988, she had already pleaded for a "wagakuni no kokkai no sōi o motte 'shokuminchishihai no ketsugi'" ('a resolution to settle the past, based upon a consensus in our national Diet'). *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, May 16, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, May 18, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, May 15, 1990.

and it is unthinkable to leave him out of this issue."<sup>7</sup>

The South Koreans saw the attitude of the Japanese government as an excuse. Some major South Korean newspapers wrote that the whole visit had better be cancelled.<sup>8</sup> The country already had plenty of problems and it could do without "humiliating diplomacy with Japan" (a phrase regularly used in South Korea).

The *Asahi Shimbun* asked different intellectuals the question what they thought about this whole issue. Most of them agreed that one could not expect apologies from the emperor, especially now that it threatened to develop into a diplomatic and political problem. Only one of them said: "It is not a political statement. It only expresses a historical fact. To let the emperor not say it, now that is politics."<sup>9</sup>

Within the LDP, anti-Korean sentiments started to grow. It was recognised that the remark "do we need to bow any deeper" was not tactful, and it was feared that now, Japan could not really "get away with it anymore". An LDP member sighed: "It is all because we did not make it clear to South Korea in advance that the government is too much tied to the past and that there is for the emperor no room in this issue for concessions." Another party member said: "With this statement, party secretary Kobuchi reflected the feelings of the Japanese people." Another one said: "The demands of South Korea to Japan are getting too much." And: "This is interference in internal affairs."<sup>10</sup>

It looked as if the government was going to stand by its point of view that the emperor could not offer apologies. There were busy negotiations between the prime minister, the Imperial Household Agency (*Kunaichō*) and the ministry of foreign affairs, about what should be said in the speech. Lawyers, men of letters and linguists were consulted.....

On May 24, president Roh finally arrived. The emperor addressed him with the following splendid words:

"If I think about the pain that the people in your country // have had to suffer in that unfortunate period, which was brought on by our country, I cannot suppress a feeling of deep grief."<sup>11</sup>

It is true that the emperor did not exactly offer his apologies but it was for the first time clearly stated in a speech of the emperor that Japan was guilty of the colonisation of Korea. The government had partly given in to the Korean demands.

Prime minister Kaifu went a step further during his meeting with president Roh:

"I humbly reflect upon it that in one period of the past, the people of the Korean peninsula have suffered unbearable

---

7

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 16, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, May 15, 1990.

9

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 16, 1990. Inoki Masamichi.

10

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 16, 1990.

11

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 25, 1990.

pain and distress through the deeds of our country and I want to offer my sincere apologies."<sup>12</sup>

The prime minister realised that there were still minor problems left. But he hoped that this had settled the problems of the past and that a start could be made in building up a new relationship. He promised that Japan would support South Korea with a Y. 4 billion fund for medical aid to victims of the atomic bombs. Regarding the problem of the Koreans at Sakhalin, he only said: "I want to make efforts, from a humanitarian point of view, to improve the co-operation between Japan and South Korea." (In the 1992 budget, a sum of money was included for investigations, but there was no decision made about concrete measures).

President Roh appreciated the words of the emperor and the prime minister very much. He believed it was possible to solve the "short-lived resentment" (*mijikai wadakamari*). He hoped to build up a successful relationship based upon a "correct perception of history".

The Japanese political parties were on the whole satisfied with the words of the emperor and the prime minister. People within the LDP who had been against the emperor going any further in his speech than his father Hirohito, hoped that South Korea would appreciate the gesture of Japan and that the whole debate about the past would be over and done with now. The only criticism came from the JCP who argued that the fact of the emperor showing his reflection on behalf of Japan was against the Constitution.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, a survey in South Korea showed that 70% of the people were not satisfied with the words of the emperor. Some Japanese newspapers therefore pointed out that 'settlement of the past' had not nearly been finished yet.<sup>14</sup> Minister Nakayama also said, as a reaction to the dissatisfaction of part of the Korean people: "We must continue our efforts."<sup>15</sup> The ministry of education decided to show its good will (it was more or less forced to) by issuing special directions concerning the treatment of the colonial period at schools. Since the course books were not re-written however, this did not have much effect.<sup>16</sup>

During the visit, the Korean foreign minister asked Japan to co-operate in the compilation of a list of names of Korean forced labourers. (In April, members of the Association of War Victims and Surviving Relatives had already come to Japan with the same request.) South Korea wanted to record history. Many of the forced labourers had never returned home and nobody knew what had happened to them. The fact that people had been forced to

---

<sup>12</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 25, 1990.

<sup>13</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 25, 1990.

<sup>14</sup>

See: *Asahi Shimbun*, May 25, 1990, *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, May 26, 1990.

<sup>15</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 30, 1990.

<sup>16</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, May 30, 1990.

change their names made it even more difficult to find out what had happened. Also, Japan had never sent news about people's death. Minister Nakayama promised to give all possible help.<sup>17</sup>

Right from the start, the investigations into the lists of names of Korean forced labourers were half-hearted. On the one hand, prime minister Kaifu insisted upon a thorough investigation but on the other hand, it was said in government circles that the results were bound to be unsatisfactory because all relevant material had been burnt after Japan's defeat. And in fact, they did not want to go into the matter too deeply, out of fear that new problems would arise regarding compensation payments.

People close to the prime minister said: "The wish of South Korea is not so strong . (.....) At the time of the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basic Relations, we already did investigations without finding anything. South Korea understood that also at that time."<sup>18</sup>

There were 5 government departments involved in the investigations: the ministry of foreign affairs, the ministry of welfare, the ministry of labour, the ministry of justice and the ministry of general affairs (*Sōmushō*). All the departments tried to shirk their responsibility. Finally, the ministry of labour undertook the co-ordination of the investigations. A few days later, it was decided to get local autonomous bodies involved in the investigations as well.

The government made it clear that they considered these investigations as having nothing to do with the *sengo shori*, the 'post-war settlement', because that matter had, after all, already been dealt with at the conclusion of the Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation. Any claims for compensation resulting from these investigations were rejected in advance. The government seemed to consider the 'post-war settlement' first of all as a matter of money, as if the inquiry into the actual facts of the *kyōsei renkō*, ('taking away by force') was not at least equally important for straightening out the past.

The Japanese government was now forced to do investigations, but it did so negligently. The research activities of private persons were, on the other hand, stimulated by the South Korean request. From all parts of the country material was brought forward. Material that had been forgotten in the cellars of libraries for many years. Lists of names were somewhat harder to find but for instance in Hokkaido, interesting documents were found concerning the story of forced labourers in the Kashinai mine of Sumitomo Mining. We know from these documents that policemen were "borrowed" for "persuading" Korean labourers to come over and that, in case they did not manage to find enough labourers, they had to threaten people. Furthermore, there turned out to be a wealth of material left in Washington about forced labourers in Japan. This had been taken by the American army before anyone could destroy it.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, *Shukusatsuban*, May 26, 1990 (day edition).

<sup>18</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, June 2, 1990.

<sup>19</sup>

See: *Asahi Shimbun*, June 24 & 25, 1990.

On August 7, 1990, Japan presented to the South Korean government a list with the names of 73,463 Korean labourers. The names found by private persons were added "for purposes of reference" (*sankō to shite*). The government had for this inquiry defined the *kyōsei renkō* as those Koreans who had come to Japan through the *kan'assen* ('official mediation') or the *chōyō* ('conscription'). Koreans of whom it was unknown how they had entered Japan were not considered *kyōsei renkō*.<sup>20</sup> A list was found with the names of 50,000 Korean soldiers and *gunzoku* ('paramilitary soldiers'), but no further attention was paid to that discovery, "because that was not what the South Korean government had asked for." Another group ignored in the investigations were the army prostitutes because "they had been recruited by private persons" (it was around this time that the particular problem of the "comfort women" was first discussed in the Diet). It may become repetitive but to give another example of how indifferently the government dealt with the inquiry: when a professor at Meiji University told that in Pusan there was available a list with 70,000 to 80,000 names the government's comment was "South Korean material must be dealt with in South Korea." They seemed to think that the inquiry was a purely South Korean problem and that Japan had only got involved in it because of those South Korean troublemakers.

There was criticism on the meagre results of the investigations. Therefore the ministry of labour continued with the inquiry. In March 1991, a new list with 1300 names was published. This list was however not based upon the investigations of the government itself.<sup>21</sup>

Why were the results of the investigations so unsatisfactory? First of all because, as we have seen, much material was destroyed just after the war. But also, says Koshō Tadashi, because material was deliberately withheld by the government and by companies. There must still be deposit reports of wages that were withheld from Korean workers, with specifications such as name, place of birth etc. of the people involved. Koshō writes furthermore that the Japanese government simply must withhold these deposit reports because otherwise the "lie" of the Treaty on Basic Relations and the Agreement on Rights of Claim and Economic Co-operation would come to light. "The only basis for the fact that two matters with legally no causal connection at all, namely "economic co-operation" and "the renunciation of rights of claim", have been dealt with simultaneously and analogously, is that "material which demonstrates a factual connection has disappeared"<sup>22</sup> (said the ministry of foreign affairs in 1965). This material, Koshō thinks, cannot be anything but the deposit reports.

Whatever it is, the whole case was settled as far as the

---

20

Koshō Tadashi, "Meibo chōsa wa naze susumanai no ka?", *Sekai*, September 1991, p. 111.

21 Koshō, p. 111.

22

Koshō, p. 114.

Japanese government was concerned. But in South Korea, things remained in a state of ferment. The different associations of war victims remained active and started to prepare (supported by Japanese lawyers) new lawsuits, exposing Japan's war guilt. Legal proceedings were instituted in August and October that year (see chapter 2). The Japanese government could however wait calmly for the outcome of these lawsuits because cases like that tend to go on for years. Until December 1991, when 3 former "comfort women" from South Korea filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government. A dreadful aspect of Japan's war record, which had been suppressed for almost half a century, was suddenly brought out into the open.

## 5. Once again: the comfort women

Satō Takeo writes: "The year 1991 was for Japan the *sengo hoshō gannen*, year 1 of the post-war compensation."<sup>1</sup> From 1990 onwards already, several lawsuits had been started by Asian war victims, mainly South Koreans, which again had brought the problem of the unsettled past to the centre of attention. Now, however, the victims would not settle for "apologies" and "reflection". They demanded financial compensation. As we have seen before, their activities were supported by Japanese lawyers and by Japanese groupings, such as "The Association for the support of Korean war criminals class BC who have had to bear the Japanese war guilt". and "The Association for the clarification of the post-war responsibility". The Japanese Social Democratic Party was involved in these activities through organising different forums about Japan's past and Japan and Asia.

When a group of 35 South Korean war victims, among whom 3 former comfort women, instituted legal proceedings against the Japanese government, the reaction of the government was: "We sympathise with these women from the bottom of our heart and we will discuss with the departmental bureaux involved how we must handle this. Generally speaking, the problem of rights of property and rights of claim has been settled completely and definitely through the Japanese-South Korean Treaty on Basis Relations and the accompanying Agreement." (ministry of foreign affairs, North-East Asia section.)<sup>2</sup>

SDP chairman Tanabe made a speech during a debate on peace in which he called for apologies and compensation for all war victims (including surviving relatives of Americans killed at Pearl Harbor) and a parliamentary resolution against war.

"We must be ashamed that Japan has not settled its post-war debt. Apologies without compensation would be hypocrisy, and compensation without apologies would be a calculating policy." He criticised the point of view of the government that "all claims for compensation between Japan and South Korea had been sufficiently and definitely settled in the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relation", including the case of the comfort women. "It is necessary in present-day Japan to rise above the law and to decide resolutely to allow compensation."<sup>3</sup>

Takagi Ken 'ichi, a lawyer involved in the suits of the Koreans at Sakhalin and of the comfort women, argued as follows:

"Although Japan has accepted the Potsdam Declaration<sup>4</sup>, in which it assumed responsibility for the inhuman deeds committed against the countries of Asia, in other words,

---

<sup>1</sup> Satō Takeo, "'Hoshō e no shiten", in *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, December 7, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, December 9, 1991.

<sup>4</sup>

In the Potsdam Declaration (July 21, 1945) it says, among other things, that war criminals should be punished and that all obstacles to the development of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people should be removed.

[the responsibility] to punish, to apologise, and compensate damage, and although it has surrendered unconditionally, it has not fulfilled this international obligation. (.....) If Japan, which has failed to pay the large sum of money that it should have paid, does not now pay back the "loan" to the Asian war victims, the "interest" of the resentment will accumulate and then it will not be possible anymore to rectify it"<sup>5</sup>

In January 1992, professor Yoshimi of Chûo University found a number of documents in the library of the Defence Agency (*Bôei chō*), from which it became clear that the army had indeed been involved in setting up and managing special army brothels. Government officials reluctantly admitted that the 'involvement' (*kanyo*) of the army could not be denied. Katō Kōichi, first cabinet secretary, said: "Regardless of the legal discussion, there are serious problems that do not consist of the interpretation of laws or treaties, but of deep wounds of the heart. This acute awareness concerning these problems must be communicated to South Korea."<sup>6</sup> But at the same time he said that compensation was out of the question.

The Japanese press paid a lot of attention to this issue. *Asahi Shimbun* wrote: "It has been known for a long time that the Imperial Army set up brothels, in that sense one need not be shocked by the material that was recently found". The paper also called for a thorough investigation into the facts.

Prime minister Miyazawa was just about to go on a state visit to South Korea (his first visit abroad after he became prime minister in 1991 - he had chosen South Korea because of his "diplomacy oriented towards Asia") and all the ingredients were there for a new 'political problem' between Japan and South Korea. Because of the rapidly increasing trade deficit of South Korea with Japan, the emotions in South Korea were already somewhat heated, and this issue further increased anti-Japanese sentiments, especially when it became known that even 12 year old girls had been taken to the front. All this resulted in demonstrations, and eggs were thrown at the Japanese embassy in Seoul. It was reason for president Roh to demand of Japan official apologies and 'suitable measures', even though the South Korean government also thought that all claims against Japan had been dealt with in the 1965 Agreement.

Prime minister Miyazawa offered his apologies during his visit to South Korea (using the words *shazai*, 'apologies' and *hansei*, 'reflection' eight times) and he promised thorough investigations to bring all the facts out into the open. He did not make any concrete proposals yet about what could be done for the unfortunate women instead of compensation.

The Japanese government first wanted to wait for the outcome

---

<sup>5</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, January 4, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, January 13, 1992.

of the lawsuit' but there were also calls for a political solution. It was decided to make haste with the investigation but right from the beginning, it was clear that the scope of it would be limited: the government mainly wanted to know to what extent the army had 'contributed' to the brothels. They were only going to study written sources found in the different ministries and they would not hear any witnesses (in order to protect people's privacy, it was said). The government feared that issues such as the Korean forced labourers would also get involved in the investigations.<sup>8</sup>

The *ianfu mondai* stirred up a lot of interest. A special phone line was set up for people to tell their story. This service was frequently used by former soldiers who wanted to ease their conscience. *Asahi Shimbun* did interviews at the Ginza and the reactions of "ordinary Japanese people" ranged from "Oh, how sad", "I feel deeply ashamed as a Japanese, the only thing we can do here is to pay compensation", "Compensation is so difficult, what counts is good education".<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, there was also much disbelief and denial, especially among older people. "Our army never did anything like that, and if it did happen, it was an exception." "Do we really need to talk about this? Do not desecrate the spirits of our war dead!" and "Do not tell our history in such a self-denigrating way. Our children will lose their pride of their country!".<sup>10</sup>

The calls were louder now for the government to finally start working seriously on "the settlement of the past". This was because of the nature of the problem - the Japanese Imperial Army as a brothel keeper. Another reason for people to insist on action now was the awareness that the victims were old already and that they might not be there anymore by the time the court would give a verdict. Supporters of compensation believed that, if Japan really wanted to be accepted as a member of the international community, contributing towards peace and stability in the world, the country would have to respect the human rights,

---

<sup>7</sup> In April 1992, the Supreme Court rejected the claim of 13 Taiwanese people (former soldiers of the Japanese army and surviving relatives) who had asked for compensation of Y 5 million each. The case had started in 1977. As a result of this case, 2 laws were enacted in 1987 and 1988 concerning 'condolence money' for surviving relatives of Taiwanese war casualties and for invalids. The amount of money was small however compared to what the Japanese received and Taiwanese living in Japan were excluded from this regulation. The Supreme Court rejected the claim because they said it was a problem "that belonged to the domain of the legislator". *Asahi Shimbun*, April 29, 1992: "It is an important issue of national policy which is entangled with diplomacy and war reparations. It is understandable that the judges recoil from it."

<sup>8</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, January 18, 1992.

<sup>9</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, January 20, 1992.

<sup>10</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, March 4, 1992.

and not only of its own citizens but also of foreigners. In Japanese government circles also there were calls for a political solution.

On the other hand, there were also sceptics, who criticised South Korea for again going on about the "36 years of colonial rule" during Miyazawa's visit, so that more important issues, such as Japan and South Korea after the cold war, could not be discussed. But they also criticised prime minister Miyazawa for squirming and for offering his apologies so easily. Satō Katsumi: "In summary, the politicians think 'if we just say sorry and deal with it like that, it is all right again.' It must be said that they do this out of self-preservation rather than out of diplomatic considerations. Japan's guilt in this is also large."<sup>11</sup> Japanese lawyers and the so-called "conscientious" citizens' movements who supported the Koreans were also criticised: "Most of the lawsuits until now have been organised by Japanese people. Of course, Japanese who are active that way believe that they are 'allies of justice' who empathise with the suppressed. But if one considers the long-term relationship between Japan and South Korea, their activities do not do any good."<sup>12</sup> The Japanese press was said to wilfully stir up emotions, to misinterpret the Treaty on Basic Relations and to ignore the good things that Japan had done. Finally, it was mainly the South Korean government that was responsible for the fact that the comfort women had not received any compensation. And then, they even dared to ignore the Treaty that they themselves had concluded! The result of this whole affair was that anti-Korean sentiments in Japan had grown again.

Interesting in this view is that the Japanese citizens' movements and lawyers are criticised for encouraging victims to start legal action. It is undoubtedly true that some of the Korean victims would never have taken this step if they had not been supported by Japanese organisations. To start a lawsuit is after all a complex business and it is not pleasant thing to do. But it is important that it was exactly Japanese lawyers and politicians that took up the matter. It shows that they did consider the "settlement of the past" as a Japanese problem, as a problem that not only concerned the victims, who still have to live with the consequences of the injustice done to them half a century ago, but that also concerned Japan itself.

In May, there was good news: in the new textbooks for secondary schools (to be used from April 1993), there was a more thorough treatment of the colonial period and of the Japanese aggression towards China.<sup>13</sup>

Each time new material came to light, there were articles about it in the newspapers. The final result of the investigation was however rather disappointing. On July 6, the government recognised not only the 'involvement' of the former Imperial Army

---

<sup>11</sup>

Satō Katsumi in "Shazai suru hodo waruku naru Nikkan Kankei", *Bungei Shunjū*, March 1992, p. 135.

<sup>12</sup>

Katsumi. p.136.

<sup>13</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, May 24, 1992.

in the brothels at the front, but also the involvement of the government of that time. However, it was said that no material had been found to prove that the women were forced to prostitution. First cabinet secretary Katō expressed his regret on behalf of the government to all countries involved, first South Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia. About the guilt of the Japanese government, which had denied its involvement for nearly 50 years, he said: "It is something that happened during the war, [a war which in itself is] something that goes above our comprehension. It took a while before we really understood it".<sup>14</sup>

Right at the moment the results were published, comments were already made about the way in which the investigation had been carried out<sup>15</sup>. Only written material had been studied, and that was mainly material which had already been published before in newspapers. Testimonies of former prostitutes and other people involved had not been heard. They had also failed to look at unofficial diaries of soldiers and officers, of which there must be a large number in the library of the Defence Agency. Furthermore, the phrase *kanyo* was rather vague. This phrase suggested 'complicity' and 'secondary involvement', which is not quite correct in the case of the army brothels.

Completely opposed to this was the following reaction: "The outcome of this investigation indicates a good share of common sense. (.....) I worry that if mistakes are made in the procedure, the problems will increase with no limit. The army circles that were involved in the management of the clubs do not exist anymore and the political system of South Korea has changed a lot recently. It is also a problem how one can allow fair compensation to people who were then treated as 'Japanese' but who have now become 'foreigners'".<sup>16</sup> But that is exactly what it was all about for the comfort women and their lawyers: the Koreans were only Japanese in name but they were certainly not treated as compatriots. The great injustice of post-war Japan was that the Koreans had suddenly become foreigners again and that they could therefore not make any claims under the support laws.

It looked as if the lawsuit of the South Korean comfort women and the soldiers was going to be a lengthy and complicated one. The government however would have to come up with concrete measures, as they had promised the South Korean president. The plan for a social fund was the one most widely supported. The ministry of foreign affairs expected that the steps they would take with regard to South Korea would establish a precedent. A possible fund for the comfort women would have to be extended to

---

<sup>14</sup>

*Asahi Shimbun*, July 7, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> It is even said that material has been tampered with.  
*Asahi Shimbun*, July 7, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Uesaka Fuyuko, in : *Nikkei Shimbun*, July 7, 1992.

other countries.<sup>17</sup>

South Korea requested Japan to continue the investigation. It was still not clear how many women had been involved and how the women had been recruited. South Korean organisations accused the Japanese government of having executed the investigation 'insincerely'.

As said before, the government denied that force had been used. Still, two weeks after the publication of the results, material was published from the Dutch temporary court martial in Batavia. It emerged from this material that the Japanese army had also set up a brothel in Semarang (Java) in which Dutch women and girls had been employed. This brothel was however closed one month later because headquarters in Tokyo "feared international criticism if it came out that the Japanese army forced minors to prostitution."<sup>18</sup> In the case of the Asian women they did apparently not worry about that (!). An important fact that came out of these court reports was that the women were forced to prostitution by threatening with death or with reprisals against relatives.

Supporters of compensation for South Korea and Asia hoped that the attempts to move the Japanese government to a "settlement of the past" would get more support, also from the west, now that it had become known that also white women had been abused by the Japanese.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of July, South Korea published an interim report about its own research activities. It was stated in the report that the recruitment of the women took place in an "atmosphere of repression and fear"<sup>20</sup>. South Korea requested Japan urgently to continue the investigations, but they did not refer to the allocation of compensation to the former comfort women. In South Korea also they were looking into possibilities for their own support measures, but still Japan was requested to take "sincere measures".<sup>21</sup>

In reaction to this report, first cabinet secretary Katō said: "We do not intend to postpone this matter and we want to decide, if possible, before the end of the year,". This indicated that the government considered including in next year's budget "measures in which our regret is expressed". The Japanese government promised to do further research but it would not change its research method.

---

<sup>17</sup> For instance, in China also a movement has started of civilians who still demand compensation, in spite of the fact that their country in 1972 had very generously renounced all claims for reparations and compensation, for the reason that the Japanese people itself had also been victim of the war.

<sup>18</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, July 22, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, July 22, 1992.

<sup>20</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, July 31, 1992.

<sup>21</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, July 31, 1992.

actually do.

## Conclusion

I have tried in this essay to describe what developments have taken place in the past 4 years regarding Japan's "settlement of the past" towards South Korea and the different views upon this issue in Japan.

Because of persistent demands from South Korea, the Japanese government has been forced to do something. It is gratifying that a fund has been established for South Korean victims of the atomic bombs, that money had been made available for the Koreans who stayed behind at Sakhalin, that school books will deal with the colonial era and the war in greater detail, and that there are plans for a social fund for former army prostitutes. If we consider however how those measures have come about, there is little reason for enthusiasm. The expressions of regret of the government are not very convincing, considering the commotion that usually precedes them. Apologies are normally made for political reasons.

Because of the lawsuits for compensation in recent years, the whole issue has acquired an important financial dimension. The government may say "It is not a material problem but a problem of the heart". But they have shown so little sympathy for the grievances of the Korean war victims and they have ignored the problems for such a long time that now, mere words will not do anymore. But more important than a financial solution is that the government makes efforts to discover all the facts about the past. Of course it is difficult after all those years to find out exactly what happened, but considering that there is so much material in archives and departmental libraries of which it was not even known that it existed (or which perhaps had been hidden away), further investigations should produce many interesting results. It is unbelievable that the government could carry out investigations so carelessly while the Japanese press closely followed the whole process. The government however mainly seems to worry about the financial aspect, which explains why its measures are so half-hearted.

The government party LDP does not show much understanding for the call for compensation from South Korea, and the other parties, excepting the SDP and the JCP, do not really seem to have any point of view on this issue at all.

There are groupings in Japan that fight for a 'correct perception' of history (one can argue about what that means, but in this particular case, there seems to be little doubt), and of the need to pay compensation, regarding not only South Korea but the whole of Asia. The SDP and the JCP have been criticising the attitude of the government for years. They have often asked critical questions during meetings of parliamentary commissions and they have done their own research into the problems. They do this out of fear of a renewed growth of militarism and nationalism, which presently seems to crop up again. Both parties are however not taken seriously as a result of the dogmatic points of view they have held in the past. LDP and SDP were able to work together on the issue of the Koreans at Sakhalin, but on other issues they are on opposite sides.

Then we must consider the intellectuals, lawyers and citizens' groups who are actively involved in stirring up discussions about the past and who support the South Koreans and other Asian war victims. I have not been able to discover why these people have only become active in the past few years but

they are actuated mainly by the respect they have for human rights, a concept which does not really exist in the mind of the Japanese. The issue of the comfort women is taken up by female activists who use it in their fight for emancipation.

Some of the newspapers, particularly *Asahi Shimbun*, pay much attention to the "settlement of the past". The press really plays the role here of "the conscience of the nation". When one sees headlines like "IANFU MONDAI", "O-KOTOBA MONDAI", one could conclude that the past is really 'alive' in Japan. However, the issues may flare up but they also go out again. That in itself is nothing unusual, but the general indifference means that things do not change quickly.

It is to be hoped that the supporters of "a settlement of the past" will continue their activities. Perhaps something at least will change then. Japan will only benefit from it.

## Bibliography

Kajima Heiwa Kenkyūjo (ed.), *Nihon Gaikō Shuyō Bunsho-Nempyō*, Vol. 2 <1961-1970>, Hara Shobō, 1983, pp. 569-586.

Lee, Chong-Sik, *Japan and Korea: The political dimension*, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1985.

Rees, David, *A short history of Modern Korea*, Ham Publishing, 1988.

## Articles

Imamura, Tsuguo, "Chosenminzoku keizokuka no rekishi o sabaku" (Judging the history of the subjection of the Korean people), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 28-32.

Kawada, Fumiko, "Ishi wa hikitsugareta", (Her last wish was passed on) *Sekai*, February 1992, pp. 246-253.

Koshō, Tadashi, "Chōsenjin kyōseirenkō meibo chōsa wa naze susumanai ka" (Why does the inquiry into the lists of names of Korean forced labourers not make any progress?), *Sekai*, September 1991, pp. 108-115.

Onuma, Yasuaki et al., "Sengo Sekinin" (Post-war responsibility), *Hōritsu Jihō*, 61(9), August 1989, pp. 6-23.

Nakajima, Tatsumi, "Kokuseki no kabe kowasu naigai no rentai o" (International solidarity that breaks down the wall of nationality), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 38-42.

Sasō, Tetsu, "Nik-Kan 'ninshiki gyappu' o kangaeru" (Thinking about the gap in perception between Japan and South Korea), *Jiyū*, October, November, December 1989.

Satō, Kazuhide, "Nihon rikugun ga setchi shita 'jūgunianfu' no shinsō" (The truth about the 'comfort women' that were created by Japan), *Shio*, March 1992, pp. 170-179.

Satō, Katsumi, et al., "Taiketsu - NikKan keizai masatsu", (Confrontation: the economic friction between Japan and South Korea) *Bungei Shunjū*, July 1992, pp. 280-284.

Satō, Takeo, "Hoshō e no shiten" ('Outlook on compensation'), *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, pp. 58-65.

Suzuki, Yūko, "Shōwashi no saianbu" (The darkest part of the history of Shōwa), *Sekai*, April 1992, pp. 101-107.

Takagi, Ken'ichi, - "Nao ubawaretsuzuketa kokyō to kazoku" (Still robbed of native village and family), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 62-66.

- "Sengo hoshō no ronri" (The logic of post-war compensation), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 6-13.

Takasaki, Sōji, "Watashitachi wa, dono yō ni sengo o koete kita

ka" (How did we spend the period after the war?), *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, pp. 30-42.

Takemura, Yasuko, "Sekai wa me o tsubutte kurenai" (The world does not close its eyes), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 85-89.

Tanaka, Akira & Satō, Katsumi, "Shazai suru hodo warukunaru NikKan kankei" (Japan and South Korea: the more apologies, the worse the relation gets), *Bungei Shunjū*, March 1992, pp. 134-142.

Tanaka, Hiroshi, "-Naze Nihon wa kako no seisan o nigeru ka" (Why does Japan flee from a settlement of the past?), *Ekonomisuto*, August 21, 1990, pp. 48-51.

- "Nihon no kyūshokuminchi shusshinsha to sengooshō" (People from former Japanese colonies and post-war compensation), *Hōritsu Jihō*, (61)9, August 1989, pp. 31-36.

Usuki, Keiko, "Towareru Nihon no sengo 'daini no tsumi'" ('The second sin' of Japan which is exposed), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 43-47.

Yamashita, Yone, "Teishintai mondai no fujō ga shimesu mono" (What the surfacing of the question of the Volunteers' Corpses signifies), *Sekai [Rinji Zōkan]*, April 1992, pp. 72-77.

Yoshimi, Yoshiaki, "Ima koso 'kako no kokufuku o'" (Especially now, it is necessary to overcome the past), *Sekai*, March 1992, pp. 117-124.

Zaima, Hidekazu, "Osaka ni okeru Tei Shō-kon no tataikai" (The fight of Chon Sangun in Osaka), *Gekkan Shakaitō*, December 1991, pp. 33-37.

---

#### Newspapers

*Asahi Shimbun*, February 1989; May, June 1990; November, December 1991; 1992: January to July.

All *Asahi* referred to are International Satellite Editions, unless otherwise specified.

*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, May 1990, December 1991, January 1992.