

The Reparations Movement for Chinese Forced Labor in Wartime Japan

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ABSTRACT

Some 40,000 Chinese, along with 700,000 Koreans, performed forced labor for private corporations in Japan during the Asia Pacific War. The presenter, having closely observed Chinese and Korean forced labor redress activities in the Fukuoka area since 2002, locates these distinct but overlapping political movements within leading models of the reparations process. A mismatch exists between the especially strong Chinese reparations claim and the Northeast Asian political context in which it is being contested. Pessimistic short-term prospects for compensation from Japan cast some doubt on the universality of redress norms and the progressive view that a new morality is driving the global trend toward repairing historical injustices. Yet due to an evolving calculus of more pragmatic concerns like economics, security and international reputation, Japan may eventually come to terms with the past in a manner partially satisfying to Chinese forced labor survivors and their government.

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1 Background and current status

Corporate Japan, led by the construction and mining industry organizations, first approached the Japanese government with the idea of importing Chinese workers in 1939. As Japan's domestic labor shortage became increasingly severe, the state turned this corporate vision into administrative reality in two steps: the November 1942 “cabinet resolution” that led to the trial introduction of laborers from China beginning in April 1943; and the February 1944 “vice-ministers’ resolution” that led to the full importation phase beginning in March 1944. Kishi Nobusuke authorized both measures, first as Minister of Commerce and Industry and then as Vice-Minister of Munitions. Kishi later spent three years in Sugamo Prison as a Class A war crimes suspect, but was released in 1948 without having been charged. He served as prime minister of Japan from 1957 to 1960. A high-level state conspiracy to cover up the facts of the Chinese forced labor program reached its peak during the Kishi administration. Kishi is considered a founding father of Japan’s long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party. His grandson, Abe Shinzo, serves as Japan’s prime minister today.

A total of 38,935 Chinese males, aged 11 to 78, were forcibly brought to Japan between 1943 and 1945, and then forced to perform harsh manual labor at 135 worksites across the country—typically mines, docks and heavy construction sites. Twenty-two of the 35 Japanese companies that profited from the forced labor are still in business, among them well-known names like Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Kajima, Sumitomo and Nippon Steel. A total of 6,830 Chinese (17.5 percent, or one out of six men) died, although at some company worksites fully half of all laborers perished. Nearly all workers were obtained, either through deception or abduction, from three provinces of North China around Beijing with the central involvement of the Japanese Imperial Army. The Japanese government today officially describes the program as “half-forced.” Tokyo has also confirmed that the wages Japanese corporations never paid out to Chinese workers and the far larger numbers of Korean labor conscripts are today being held by the Bank of Japan.

Unlike most other World War II-related redress movements targeting Japan, basic facts about the Chinese forced labor program are not in dispute. That is because in the spring of 1946 the Japanese government secretly surveyed all 35 companies involved and compiled the 646-page “Investigative Report on Working Conditions of Chinese Laborers,” better known as the Foreign Ministry Report (FMR). Highlighting the strong continuity of interaction between Japan’s wartime and immediate postwar state and industry, the project was meant to portray the forced labor program in the best possible

light before American Occupation authorities could launch formal war crimes investigations. Widespread CFL prosecutions had been expected because the war's victorious Allied coalition included the Nationalist Chinese government. Due to Cold War political priorities, however, the war crimes tribunal at Yokohama prosecuted only a handful of low-level corporate staff for the systematic abuse of Chinese. Light sentences were meted out by the Allied tribunal, and these were commuted by the Japanese government soon after the Occupation ended.

The FMR lists the names of all 38,935 workers along with details including hometowns, occupations, next of kin, methods of procurement, location and duration of detention in North China, ports of departure from China and arrival in Japan, and names of ships. Circumstances of food, clothing, housing, work and supervision at company sites are described, along with accounts of disturbances and postwar repatriation to China. Amid the five-volume document's tables and statistics is the Foreign Ministry's conclusion that the labor program was a huge financial burden on corporations and failed to alleviate Japan's manpower crisis as intended. For this reason, remarkably, all 35 Japanese companies became "double winners" by receiving generous payouts from state coffers in 1946 as indemnification for costs incurred through their use of Chinese workers—who were themselves virtually never paid for their labor.

The long-suppressed Foreign Ministry Report itself was obtained in 1993 by Japan's respected public broadcaster, NHK. But the Japanese government still maintains that it destroyed all of its own copies of the FMR decades ago. There is some reason to doubt this claim. In 2003 the Foreign Ministry searched a basement storeroom and found 20,000 pages of Chinese forced labor records submitted by corporations 57 years earlier, reinforcing the lengthy state-industry track record of insincerity on the CFL issue.

Hundreds of former Chinese workers have filed compensation lawsuits in a dozen courtrooms across Japan since 1995. Even while rejecting most claims, Japanese judges routinely find that the Japanese state and companies jointly engaged in illegal conduct by forcibly transporting the Chinese plaintiffs to Japan and forcing them to work under wretched conditions. Claims against corporations are usually turned down due to time bars for filing the lawsuits and claims against the government are nearly always dismissed on the grounds of state immunity, as the Meiji Constitution in effect at the time of the crimes did not permit suing the state for redress. Courts have issued four compensation awards so far, making the CFL suits the most successful class of war-related litigation in Japan. None of these awards have been finalized, though, and three cases are now before the Japan Supreme Court. Japanese judges have occasionally suggested that forced labor survivors should be redressed through

legislative means.

Two separate Chinese forced labor lawsuits have been filed in Fukuoka, where court rulings have castigated the state's "malicious destruction of evidence" and corporate conduct that "can only be described as evil." Concluding that the "slave-like forced labor was an outrageous transgression of human dignity," the Fukuoka High Court stated in May 2004: "The Chinese men, who had been living in peace and were not subject to Japanese national sovereignty, were, through the intentional use of violence and deception, separated from their families, taken to an enemy country and forced to work there."

Mitsubishi Materials Corp., however, recently pioneered an aggressive defense strategy in Fukuoka based on revisionist historical arguments. Mitsubishi lawyers summarily denied that forced labor or any mistreatment took place in its wartime coal mine where 25 percent of Chinese workers died in less than one year. Mitsubishi heaped criticism on the unfairness of the Tokyo Trials, questioned whether Japan ever "invaded" China at all, and warned that a redress award for the elderly Chinese men—or even a court finding that forced labor occurred—would saddle Japan with a "mistaken burden of the soul" for hundreds of years. Fewer than 10 percent of the Chinese victims of forced labor in Japan are believed to be alive today.

Meanwhile, a vital point of reference for understanding the possibilities and limitations of the CFL reparations movement is the dynamic redress campaign involving Korean forced labor in wartime Japan, a separate program that involved hundreds of thousands of victims. In 2005 the South Korean government's Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization under Japanese Imperialism began making fact-finding inspections of former worksites across Japan and requesting worker name rosters from Japanese corporations. The Japanese government is now repatriating Korean forced laborer remains, while Korean family members have begun making memorial visits to sites in Japan and overseas where their relatives died. Legislation to compensate former Korean workers and families using state funds is now pending in South Korea's national assembly. Committed efforts by Japanese activists and a transnational Japanese-Korean civil society have made these results possible.

Approved at Kyushu University in March 2007, my Ph.D. dissertation analyzes the origins and development of the reparations movement for Chinese forced labor in wartime Japan, and locates the ongoing movement within the emerging global trend toward repairing historical injustices. The following questions are addressed in this paper:

- What are the key features of the CFL reparations movement unfolding today?
- To what extent can other reparations movements, such as the Korean forced labor redress campaign, serve as models or templates for the Chinese case?
- How does the Chinese forced labor reparations movement fit into the contemporary global trend toward repairing historical injustices?

It is significant to ask such questions because the “history problem,” of which the legacy of forced labor is a major element, continues to negatively impact integration and reconciliation within Northeast Asia at state and non-state levels. The topic is important within the field of Japanese war responsibility and as a “litmus test” for the global reparations trend. The transportability, or non-transportability, across regions and political cultures of normative standards envisioned by some reparations theorists is explored. The research serves as a bridge linking the general theoretical base with the specific case studies of Chinese and Korean forced labor in Japan.

2 Reparations in theory

These reparations movements are not occurring in a Northeast Asian vacuum. The most relevant example of how other liberal democratic societies are settling historical accounts is the German Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future.” Established in the year 2000 with 10 billion DM (approximately \$6 billion) provided by the German state and industry, the fund recently finished paying out symbolic compensation of up to \$10,000 to about 1.6 million survivors of Nazi-era forced labor or their heirs. The Austrian Reconciliation Fund has similarly finished paying out nearly \$350 million to 132,000 workers forced to toil for the Nazi war machine, or their family members. Beginning in the mid-1990s, Swiss and French banks and insurance companies have also paid hefty restitution for assets looted from Holocaust victims. Official apologies and educational programs are important elements of reparations for these so-called “Holocaust restitution” cases.

The U.S. Congress and the Canadian Parliament, within weeks of each other in 1988, voted to grant official apologies and individual monetary compensation to ethnic Japanese interned during the war. Since those seminal achievements, the expansive and increasingly borderless reparations trend has come to include historical truth commissions in dozens of countries for gross human rights violations; the return of cultural artifacts, human remains and ancestral lands to native peoples and countries of origins; and the rewriting of educational curricula to honestly confront past wrongdoing. Movements concerning slavery in the United States, as well as European cooperation with the slavery system, and Western colonialism are continuing with mixed results. Still

in its infancy, the global reparations movement is one of the most conspicuous social and political trends of the post-Cold War era.

Dozens of books and articles have appeared over the past decade and numerous academic conferences have been convened on the interdisciplinary theme of “coming to terms with the past.” Some writers seek to identify the roots of the shift to a “reparations mindset,” mainly (but certainly not exclusively) within and between Western liberal democratic societies. Other writers describe the reparations process in terms of overlapping stages. Still others take a normative approach, starting with the assumption that granting reparations for past wrongs is desirable and essentially outlining a roadmap for successful redress campaigns.

The year 2006 saw three major new volumes, written by leading reparations specialists and published by leading academic presses. Titles include 1) *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation* (from Stanford University Press, edited by Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn); 2) *Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: On Reparations Politics* (from Harvard University Press, authored by John Torpey); and 3) *The Handbook of Reparations* (from Oxford University Press, edited by Pablo de Greiff). The latter book from Oxford (de Greiff 2006) is more than 1,000 pages long and represents the work of 27 authors, but the word “Japan” does not even appear in the index, despite the large number of ongoing reparations claims stemming from Japanese war conduct. The under-representation of Asia in the English-language literature stems partly from linguistic barriers and perhaps cultural ethnocentrism.

In the new book from Stanford (Barkan and Karn 2006), case studies include Australian apologies to aboriginal peoples, U.S. government apologies to Native Americans, the redress movement for slavery in America, French apologies for Nazi collaboration, and Germany’s forced labor compensation fund. Again, Japan is not listed in the book’s index and there are no Asian case studies. The edited Stanford volume also has a section describing conceptual approaches and obstacles to “amending the past.” Barkan and Karn describe an “ethical imperative” that motivates some societies to confront historical injustices and locate its source in classical antiquity: the ideal of justice found in Plato’s *Republic*. “Our striving for justice, however naïve or idyllic it appears in the light of rational skepticism, nevertheless is rooted deeply in our conscience so that we find ourselves bothered even by distant episodes of injustices to which we are not directly party,” they write (Barkan and Karn 2006, 2).

Barkan referred a full decade ago to a “new worldwide moral economy” with respect to repairing historical wrongs through “restitution,” a term he defines as the functional equivalent of my use of “reparations” (Barkan 1996). His influential book, *The Guilt of*

Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices (Barkan 2001), likely represents the most developed theoretical presentation by a single author. That book is divided into two parts: “Residues of World War II” and “Colonialism and its Aftermath.” The first part discusses Japanese American redress, comfort women redress, claims stemming from the plundering by Russia of art from German museums after WWII, the mid-1990s Holocaust restitution cases, and restitution to war victims in East Central Europe. The second part examines the recent restitution to Native Americans in the U.S., “First Nations” in Canada and Aborigines in Australia of land, human remains and sacred objects. The reparations movement for slavery in America is also considered. The lengthy concluding chapter is called “Toward a Theory of Restitution” and contains a section called “Toward a Neo-Enlightenment Morality.” Writes Barkan (2001, 312): “Neo-Enlightenment morality takes the liberal framework of individual rights as a core value and adds to it a vague and variable set of local circumstances and traditions.”

The problem with applying Barkan’s concepts to Japan and forced labor reparations claims is that the Japanese manifestation of the liberal framework of individual rights and the Japanese set of local circumstances and traditions have proven stubbornly unreceptive. Were Japan to embrace “neo-Enlightenment morality” as some other liberal democratic nations are now doing, material compensation for victims of actual WWII war crimes would be only the start. Official apologies, cultural restitution and major educational initiatives involving Ainu and Okinawans would be required as well. Barkan observes that “being part of liberal society also means that the public expects justice and feels guilty when implicated by injustice. The public is expected to feel guilty even about injustices perpetrated by an earlier generation” (Barkan 2001, 315). But whereas Japanese society has been strongly implicated by injustice by the nation’s own courts with regard to the Chinese labor program, the expressions of the requisite guilt, and perhaps even the expectations of justice, are lacking. The evident Japanese deficit in neo-Enlightenment morality has produced a mismatch between reparations theory and Japanese practice to date.

In the new book from Harvard (Torpey 2006), John Torpey considers the “surfacing of subterranean history” in explaining why the global reparations trend has arisen now, and then offers an “anatomy of reparations politics.” Torpey considers the cases of the Japanese American and Japanese Canadian redress movements, adding the updated perspectives of commemoration and reconciliation to the analysis. He also discusses the cases of reparations for black Americans due to slavery and reparations politics in post-apartheid Namibia and South Africa. Torpey is noteworthy for his “field mapping” approach that represents stages of the reparations process as four concentric circles. Moving from the innermost to the outermost ring, these four stages are labeled as follows: transitional justice; compensation (financial and in-kind); apology/regret; and

communicative history (memory, memorials, historical consciousness).

Torpey says redress work typically begins in the innermost circle and proceeds in an outward direction. “As one moves from the center of the map to its periphery, the stress in the types of activity tends to move from a focus on the perpetrators to a concern with the victims or their descendants,” he writes (Torpey 2006, 50). The CFL redress claim has made relatively strong progress in recent years, but only in the outermost circle of “communicative history.” There has been almost no progress in the inner three rings, so Torpey would consider the CFL claim an anomaly in terms of its directionality. This has stemmed from the relative lack of “transitional justice” following Japan’s defeat in 1945, as illustrated by the purposeful evasion of responsibility by the Japanese state and corporations.

An earlier edited volume that has influenced academic discussion was called, *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustices* (Brooks 1999). Some 50 authors contributed to the weighty book, which included separate sections on redress for German war conduct, Japanese war conduct, the Japanese American internment, mistreatment of Native Americans, American slavery, and South African apartheid. In his often-cited first article in the collection, “The Age of Apology,” Roy Brooks (1999, 7) described five factors that make for a “meritorious” redress claim: “1) a human injustice must have been committed; 2) it must be well-documented; 3) the victims must be identifiable as a distinct group; 4) the current members of the group must continue to suffer harm; and 5) such harm must be causally connected to a past injustice.” The Chinese forced labor reparations claim strongly fulfills all five of Brooks’ conditions, making CFL highly meritorious. The Korean forced labor claim, as discussed below, is less strong.

Brooks further identifies four elements of a “theory of redress” that must be present if a given claim is to succeed: 1) movements should be legislative in nature, not judicial; 2) political pressure must be placed upon legislators; 3) there must be strong internal support for the claim among victims themselves; and 4) the claim itself must be meritorious, as just defined (Brooks 1999, 6-7). Here, although CFL redress clearly fulfills the third and fourth conditions, the first and second elements are missing: the movement has remained confined to the Japanese court system for the past decade and Japanese legislators are under little or no pressure to resolve it. Brooks distinguishes between “reparations” that involve remorse and atonement and “settlements” that do not; these can be extended to groups or individuals and be “compensatory” or “rehabilitative” in nature.

The Asian Women’s Fund of 1995, Japan’s quasi-governmental response to the

generally meritorious comfort women claim, represents a cross between reparations and a settlement, according to Brooks. The redress demands of former comfort women continue today because of this ambiguity, and due to recent statements by Japanese leaders suggesting insincerity on the state's part. To employ Brooks' terminology, the compensation fund set up by Kajima Corp. in 2000 for former Chinese forced laborers at the Hanaoka worksite was essentially a monetary settlement intended for group rehabilitation. As such, it left many Hanaoka survivors angry and dissatisfied, especially since Kajima issued a statement on the same day the fund was established that specifically denied all wrongdoing.

Skepticism and criticism regarding the reparations trend also exist. One scholarly debate is between "idealists" arguing that the global reparations trend is being driven by the post-Cold War emergence of universal values and is here to stay, and "realists" who counter that any "new morality" perceived in the explosion of reparations cases is temporary and bound by political culture. These latter skeptics contend that recent state-corporate compensation programs, in particular, have resulted mainly from actors' traditional self-interested calculations of economic costs and benefits, although other factors such as security and international reputation have played important roles. A "black armband" view of history and the "politics of victimization" have been perceived by some critics in recent events such as Australia's establishment of a "National Sorry Day." Others writers, some of them politically progressive, have lamented the importance attached to official apologies because it tends to reinforce the primacy of the nation-state system, while the focus on historical wrongs tends to deflect attention from present-day injustices. The relationship between "reconciliation" and "reparations," meanwhile, requires further theoretical study. A certain thickness of reconciliation between states or groups may be required for even placing the question of reparations on the agenda, even as the lack of reparations discourages reconciliation from taking root.

3 Chinese forced labor reparations movement

Throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s, a "proto-reparations" movement within Japanese civil society actively confronted the legacy of Chinese forced labor by collecting the remains of workers who had died and pushing the Japanese government to repatriate them to China. The progressive citizens movement also erected memorial monuments and held memorial services, while compiling name rosters and engaging in basic truth telling about the labor program's forcible nature. Actors within the movement were empowered by their possession of the Foreign Ministry Report (FMR), which had been secretly compiled in 1946 and then leaked to the Tokyo office of the Overseas

Chinese Association by a conscientious former employee of the Foreign Ministry around 1950. The massive report publicly surfaced in 1993, finally making untenable the Japanese government's long-running false portrayal of the CFL program as one of voluntary contract labor in which the state was never actively involved.

The Japanese government went to great lengths to evade responsibility for Chinese forced labor during the Cold War era by suppressing evidence, formulating a cover-up strategy, and repeatedly lying to the Diet and citizen groups. The state campaign of deception peaked in the late 1950s during the administration of Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, who had been formally in charge of the CFL scheme. The government sabotaged grassroots redress efforts and blocked the forced labor issue from being raised in the Diet because of its potentially explosive impact on the controversial revision of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, to avoid reparations demands from the Chinese government, and because sitting state officials had been personally involved. The full extent of this state campaign became clear in 2002 with the declassification and release of records from the Foreign Ministry archives, dealing with the CFL legacy during the years 1952-72 (Fukuoka Bengodan 2003; Underwood 2005). This vital archives release was barely covered by the Japanese media, so few Japanese are today aware of the proto-reparations movement or their government's staunch opposition to it.

Turning to the People's Republic of China during the Cold War, there is virtually no reparations activity to report. CFL survivors were denied recognition of their victimization at the personal level because the PRC government denied recognition of Chinese society's victimization at the collective level. As the Chinese Communist Party's foundational narrative emphasized resistance and victory, there was no room in Chinese historical memory for the image of Chinese workers being abducted—with the assistance of Chinese collaborators—and carted off to humiliating forced labor in Japanese coal mines. Former workers were instead frequently persecuted within postwar Chinese society, where prevailing political conditions would have made the concept of redress for individual victims of WWII injustices absurd. The concept is clearly Western in origin and fundamentally alien to Marxist-Leninist political tradition.

Moving into the 1990s, changing political conditions in Northeast Asia produced a wide range of reparations claims against Japan. In July 1990, Chinese survivors of the Hanaoka Incident and Kajima Corp. jointly issued the following unprecedented statement: "It is an historical fact that the Chinese workers were victimized at the Hanaoka Mine branch, due to the forced migration and forced labor effectuated by a Cabinet Decree. The Kajima Corporation admits this as fact, recognizes its corporate responsibility, and thus expresses a sincere apology toward the Chinese survivors and

relatives concerned" (Uchida 2001). Kajima's recognition of its corporate responsibility and its "sincere apology" came only two years after the Japanese American redress law and predated the German forced labor compensation fund by a full decade. However, the statement produced a sense of optimism regarding the future of CFL redress that proved to be seriously premature. The Hanaoka compensation fund eventually set up by Kajima in 2000 lacked an apology, rejected any corporate responsibility and produced only partial reconciliation at best.

Premature optimism also resulted from the "NHK scoop" of 1993, referring to the discovery by Japan's public broadcaster of the FMR and the major documentary called, "The Phantom Foreign Ministry Report: The Record of Chinese Forced Labor." The television program and a 1994 book of the same title likely represented the hardest-hitting investigation in NHK's history, especially since the primary target was the state itself. In a subsection of the book called "Ongoing Evasion of Responsibility by the Government and Corporations," NHK advocated repairing the injustice of Chinese forced labor and came close to violating the political neutrality mandated by its charter—ironically, something it is accused of today due to general support of government positions.

The national Lawyers Group for the Compensation Claims of Chinese War Victims (National Bengodan) was launched in Tokyo in August 1995 and has overseen the filing of more than two dozen compensation lawsuits by Chinese victims of various Japanese war crimes. Roughly half of the cases have involved Chinese forced labor, which most observers view as the best hope for obtaining justice for Chinese war victims in their lifetimes. Yet due to the lack of a history consensus among Japanese society at large and insufficient awareness of Japan's primary wartime role as victimizer, building a base of domestic support for redress has been proven to be "unimaginably difficult" (National Bengodan 2005, 280). Working mostly pro bono, the National Bengodan attorneys cooperate closely with the Society to Support the Demands of Chinese War Victims, also based in Tokyo and better known as Suopei—the Chinese word for redress.

Suopei maintains an extensive website at www.suopei.org and publishes a quarterly newsletter that provides up-to-date information about Chinese forced labor and other lawsuits. Suopei thus serves as a window into the concrete reparations activities taking place among Japanese citizens in various localities, while providing some information about activities in China. Suopei coordinates signature drives, raises funds, and mobilizes supporters to attend courtroom hearings. In the Japanese cities where litigation has been introduced, there are local branches of both the National Bengodan and Suopei. The Fukuoka Lawyers Group for Chinese Forced Labor Lawsuits (Fukuoka

Bengodan) was formed in 2000 and exists under the umbrella of the national lawyers group.

The Fukuoka Bengodan has been especially active in the area of publishing, in an effort to increase public support for the claim. Book- or booklet-length publications provide oral histories of former workers typically submitted as court testimony, reproduction of articles from Japanese and Chinese media sources, extracts from pertinent government documents, summaries and explanations of court rulings, and the legislative compensation fund proposal. (The parliamentary bill is modeled on the German forced labor compensation fund and has Diet backers, but it has not yet been formally introduced). Issue framing has included linking the CFL claim to recent or current events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, history textbook disputes, constitutional revision and the North Korea abductions.

The Fukuoka Society to Support the Demands of Chinese War Victims is the local branch of the national Suopei. The Fukuoka Suopei essentially carries out on the local level the same activities that Suopei conducts nationally, and cooperates closely with the Japan-China Friendship Association. These activities tend to be organized around court appearances by Chinese plaintiffs. Public meetings and press conferences held in conjunction with court hearings allow former workers to relate their experiences to at least some segment of Japanese society, giving them a public voice and producing some healing. These activities also help educate Japanese society about the historical reality and can be considered elements of the reparations process. Fieldwork at former CFL sites and memorial services at CFL monuments are often involved as well.

The term “reparations entrepreneurs” refers to private citizens playing key redress roles, often in peripheral regions and not necessarily connected to courtroom litigation. In several cases Japanese citizens have determined the names and hometowns of workers who died in Japan and then tracked down family members in China; these relatives typically had no knowledge about the workers’ wartime fates. In Nagasaki and Hiroshima, where reparations entrepreneurs are sometimes second-generation victims of the atomic bombings, redress work involves dual narratives of Japanese as both victims and victimizers. Last year the atomic bomb museums in Nagasaki and Hiroshima provided CFL name lists to the Memorial Museum for Workers Martyred in Japan, located in the Chinese city of Tianjin. As dozens of Chinese were killed in the blasts, the Japanese museums also assisted in the preparation of interpretative displays for the Chinese museum and provided testimonies of Japanese *hibakusha*.

Numerous other examples of grassroots reparations and reconciliation activities can be cited, dispelling any image of uniform “historical amnesia” regarding Chinese forced

labor. These usually involve memorial ceremonies and often represent reconnections with the redress movement of the 1950s. A memorial service involving Chinese survivors and families was held in Kansai in 1998; the previous service had been in 1957 and was attended by representatives of the Chinese Red Cross during the proto-reparations phase. Japanese residents of Kansai, in turn, attended a memorial service later in 1998 at the CFL “name wall” monument in Tianjin, which ethnic Chinese in Kobe had previously helped erect. A new “Japan-China Friendship Memorial” commemorating the deaths of forced laborers was unveiled in Osaka in 2005, using granite from China and with Chinese relatives in attendance.

In Kumamoto, the thirty-fifth annual CFL memorial service was conducted last year, this time for both Chinese and Korean forced labor victims. In Gunma, annual CFL memorial services have been held without interruption at a Buddhist temple in Ota city for 54 years. In Gifu, memorial ceremonies were initiated in 1957 but then suspended with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in China. They were resumed in 2001. In Hokkaido, a 75-year-old Chinese forced labor survivor recently visited his former worksite for the first time in 61 years and met with the 73-year-old grandson of the coal mine’s wartime manager. The two men remembered each other from their youth, as the Chinese was the youngest of 294 workers there. In recent years they have been engaging in reconciliation at the personal level by exchanging letters and photos of their own grandchildren.

Meanwhile, the center of gravity for reparations activities may be shifting to China. Chinese media reported in early 2006 that Chinese courts will begin allowing survivors of forced labor in Japan to bring class-action lawsuits against Japanese corporations, representing the first litigation of its kind in China. (The Chinese government now appears to be backsliding on opening up this unprecedented reparations venue, however, or perhaps waiting for decisions on three relevant CFL cases now before the Japan Supreme Court.) In 2005, not long after anti-Japanese street demonstrations in China, Beijing authorities permitted the establishment of a non-governmental fund that has collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions from Chinese citizens and corporations in support of legal efforts by victims of Japanese war crimes. Chinese media prominently report the results of CFL court cases in Japan, along with the presentation to the Chinese offices of major Japanese firms of written petitions demanding redress.

Forced labor in Japan has also been the theme of a war-related television drama series in China, where the more assertive internet generation is picking up the reparations torch as elderly CFL survivors pass from the scene. A five-volume collection of oral histories of forced laborers was released by a Beijing publisher in 2005 and historical

research is being conducted more vigorously than ever. Underscoring the important “communicative history” work, the newly expanded CFL memorial museum in Tianjin includes a mausoleum housing the human remains of two thousand Chinese workers, with these now being stored in refurbished wooden cubicles with glass doors. The first CFL museum in Shanghai is now being planned.

Chinese “history activists” and “popular nationalists” at the sub-state level are becoming more independent of the Chinese government, which must balance the conflicting priorities of state nationalism and popular nationalism in attempting to manage the movement. “The Communist Party has lost its hegemony over Chinese nationalist discourse,” states Gries (2004, 136). “Popular nationalists now command a large following and exert tremendous pressure on those who decide the PRC’s foreign policy. In fact, the legitimacy of the current regime depends upon its ability to stay on top of popular nationalist demands.” To extrapolate this argument, bottom-up pressure may someday compel the government to actively press the CFL claim. This might occur if Mitsubishi-style corporate denials of the forced labor reality come to be advanced in a Chinese courtroom, or even in the Chinese court of public opinion. This, according to Gries, would humiliate the Chinese nation, cause it to lose face and even represent Japanese “aggression.” The CFL claim under such a scenario might evolve from its current status as potential cost for the Chinese state to avoid into a potential benefit to be embraced.

Currently, however, reparations activities within China remain passively tolerated only, partly because history-based individual demands for justice involving Japan could trigger similar demands involving the Chinese regime. Not only did Japan’s invasion of China help bring the CCP to power, then, Japan’s inadequate approach to its postwar responsibility is helping to perpetuate the party’s legitimacy and enabling it to delay democratic reforms. In this sense, the Chinese state might prefer that reparations claims against Japan remain “pending” rather than “resolved.”

4 Korean forced labor reparations movement

Like the wartime labor programs themselves, the current redress campaigns for Korean forced labor (KFL) and Chinese forced labor (CFL) are progressing alongside each other but are basically distinct. The Korean case is today achieving notable success in terms of truth telling and raising public awareness about human remains still in Japan, while Korean families have begun visits (jointly funded by Japan and South Korea) to sites where their conscripted relatives died. Legal claims for material compensation have failed in Japanese, South Korean and American courts and are no longer a central

movement goal. The Seoul government is now pushing national legislation to compensate former workers using domestic funds, even as the Bank of Japan continues to possess unpaid wages and related monies that corporations failed to pay out. In fact, the dynamic Korean forced labor movement is being propelled by the direct involvement of the South Korean government and the activities of a Korean-Japanese transnational civil society that are without parallel in Asia or perhaps anywhere. To some degree, the KFL redress movement may offer useful lessons for the Chinese case.

“All the Emperor’s children” was an often-repeated slogan framing the evolving process of “group importation” through which 700,000 Koreans were coerced into working for private companies in Japan between 1939 and 1945. Subsequent to enactment of the National General Mobilization Law, the three stages of the Korean labor program were 1) “recruitment” (*boshu*) beginning in July 1939; 2) “official mediation” (*kan assen*) beginning in February 1942; and 3) “conscription” or “requisition” (*choyo*) beginning in September 1944, with enactment of the National Conscription Law. Japanese companies were the primary actors during the initial “recruitment” phase; Korean administrators were the main players during the more systematic and centralized “mediation” phase; and the final labor “requisition” phase was openly forcible. All three phases can be reasonably described as “conscription” in the generic sense, although mobilization through the physical coercion of the third stage was adopted only after more subtly forcible methods of indoctrination, deception and social stigmatization proved incapable of meeting labor needs.

Partly to discourage escapes, which eventually involved nearly half the total Korean workforce, laborers were provided with pocket money at most. Corporations funneled the bulk of wages into mandatory “patriotic savings accounts” and made regular deductions for the national welfare pension fund, as well as for room and board and the cost of transportation from Korea. Companies, not workers, maintained possession of the savings and pension passbooks, while promises to send money home to families in Korea mostly never materialized. Numerous violent disturbances involving thousands of Koreans and Chinese occurred across Japan in the weeks following the nation’s surrender, with unpaid wages being a central cause of unrest. It has become clear only in recent years that the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, with American approval, instructed corporations to deposit all unpaid monies for Korean workers into the national treasury in 1946. This process was completed by 1948, but the Japanese side treated the existence of the wage deposits as a state secret during drawn-out negotiations leading up to the 1965 restoration of bilateral ties with South Korea. That normalization accord provided state-level payments from Tokyo to Seoul, representing reparations in the view of the latter and economic assistance in the view of the former,

while extinguishing the right of Korean conscripts and bereaved families to claim compensation.

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun in January and August 2005 made public all 35,000 pages of diplomatic records of negotiations leading up to the 1965 treaty with Japan, setting a new regional standard for information disclosure as bilateral ties deteriorated during the commemorative “Year of Friendship.” Alluding to the existence of global reparations norms, Roh said in 2005 that Japan continues to bear legal responsibility for certain wartime abuses, adding that “this is an issue of universal ethics in a human society and a matter of trust between neighbors” (*International Herald Tribune* 2005). Having himself apologized in for the 1948 massacre of Cheju Island residents by Korean police, Roh also suggested that Japan deviates from a global redress standard during a state visit to Germany, where he told a leading newspaper that Japan’s postwar behavior has been a “grave global misfortune” and said that “the Japanese attitude does not fit with mankind’s universal values” (*Korea Times* 2005).

The Seoul government’s 85-member Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization under Japanese Imperialism (website at www.gangje.go.kr/en_index.asp) has conducted fact-finding investigations at dozens of former worksites across Japan since 2005. South Korean and Japanese officials have also carried out joint government inspections of charnel houses containing cremated Korean remains. More than two thousand sets of remains have now been located, about half of them based on information supplied by temples, municipalities and corporations following Japanese government requests and South Korean government prodding. South Korean officials and private citizens are observing Japanese efforts to retrieve human remains from East Asian battlefields. None of these actions aim at obtaining material compensation, but all are vital parts of the broader reparations process. The global redress trend of recent years offers few precedents for such committed state involvement in redress efforts targeting a neighboring democratic state.

Within South Korea, the Truth Commission on Forced Mobilization has received more than 200,000 applications for forced labor certification. The Truth Commission has advanced the healing process by recognizing thousands of victims and collecting testimony during public hearings across the country, compiling a first-person record of forced labor and a long list of Japanese corporations that benefited. Oral histories have been published, in Korean and Japanese, and a documentary movie is being planned. The commission has also certified as involuntary conscripts Koreans convicted of Class B and C war crimes stemming from mistreatment of Allied prisoners of war; men long considered to have been collaborators are being newly described as “double victims” whose honor should be restored. Altogether, Seoul has established one dozen

historical truth commissions that seek not only to establish an accurate record of forced labor, but also to affix blame for colonial-era collaboration with Japan and the myriad abuses of state authority during the postwar period of military dictatorship. In addition, activists are publicizing the names of South Korean corporations that were major beneficiaries of the economic aid from Japan, and urging these firms to establish a fund to assist forced labor victims.

Complementing the state-level external pressure from across the Sea of Japan, or the East Sea to Koreans, the Japanese government and corporations are being pressed in new ways from within and below. The KFL redress movement's capabilities have been greatly enhanced by the Truth-Seeking Network for Forced Mobilization (hereafter, the Truth Network, www.ksyc.jp/sinsou-net), a Japanese group made up of professional historians as well as citizen researchers and activists. The Truth Network was formed in July 2005 specifically to facilitate the work of the South Korean government's Truth Commission within Japan and has grassroots chapters throughout the country. Network members are also active in issues involving history textbooks, Yasukuni, constitutional revision and discrimination against minority groups like *burakumin* and ethnic Korean residents (zainichi Koreans).

The most ambitious Truth Network reparations project to date was called "Together with Bereaved Korean Families: Solving the Remains Problem in Summer 2006" (website at homepage3.nifty.com/iimptc). Aimed at raising awareness of Korean forced labor in general and the bones issue in particular, and funded primarily by private Japanese donations, the month-long program of events featured visits to Japan by South Korean family members of conscripts who died on the job, along with public memorial services and symposiums at two dozen sites nationwide. The climax to the summer program came in Sarufutsu village in Hokkaido in August 2006, when Japanese, Koreans, zainichi Koreans, Chinese and Ainu jointly excavated a communal grave in an open field containing the unidentified remains of Koreans who died during the wartime construction of a nearby airfield. Making fuller use of the internet than Japanese activist groups usually do, the Truth Network and affiliated South Korean websites uploaded photos and citizens' resolutions from the events in Hokkaido and other regions on a near-daily basis.

From a Fukuoka perspective (in Underwood 2006c), I have previously described how Japanese citizen researchers have scoured local cremation records, old industry reports, corporate histories, municipal histories and a range of public records for facts about conscription. Activists have identified remains, notified the Truth Commission in Seoul, and then hosted visits by bereaved family members and Korean government representatives. Memorial services and public symposiums have recently been held

amid considerable media coverage, advancing historical awareness and the overall reparations process. Progressive ethnic Korean activists began compiling name rosters of company conscripts in the 1970s, and redress work gradually expanded to include more mainstream Japanese activists and broader goals such as cultural exchange. In 2000 the Izuka city government in Fukuoka was pressured into constructing a special charnel house for Korean remains, and South Korean diplomats have attended memorial services there. The Japanese government stresses that it is partially funding activities such as remains repatriation and family pilgrimages on humanitarian grounds, while Koreans and their Japanese supporters desire a fuller accounting that clarifies the reality of the forced labor system.

KFL redress movement as model for CFL case?

These achievements and capabilities of the KFL reparations movement come into sharper focus when contrasted with those of the CFL reparations movement. The lack of civil liberties in China, political asymmetry between China and Japan, and the relative thinness of civil society links are currently limiting progress in the Chinese victims' case. Yet the intriguing question remains: Can the Korean movement serve as a model or roadmap for the Chinese case?

Like South Korea under military rule, the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party—rightfully criticized for allowing forced labor in the nation's penal system today—rejects the concept of individual redress for human rights violations. Repressive states are obviously less likely to press target states for reparations on behalf of their citizens, a reality that represents a major handicap for the Chinese forced labor case. In 1995 the Beijing government did informally give Chinese citizens the green light to bring lawsuits in Japan, but the overriding priority for Chinese authorities is to maintain stable political and economic relations with Tokyo and Japanese companies. Japanese and overseas activists in early 2007 lobbied the Chinese government to publicly support the CFL claim in a crucial case before the Japan Supreme Court, a step that would likely land Chinese activists in jail. Beijing has not backed the movement in the South Korean fashion, through means such as a state truth commission or President Roh's fiery anti-Japanese rhetoric.

In the KFL case, three-party synergism involving the Seoul government and citizen networks in South Korea and Japan has produced a range of creative approaches. In 2003 a coalition of nearly 60 citizen groups in South Korea and Japan demanded of both their respective governments that Japan apologize and pay compensation for its war responsibility. Korean plaintiffs in a forced labor lawsuit in Japan have become shareholders in the company involved and agitated for compensation at annual

shareholders' meetings in Japan, submitting a petition in 2005 with the signatures of more than 50 members of South Korea's National Assembly from both the ruling and opposition parties. During international acrimony over revisionist Japanese history textbooks, South Korean local governments have used their "sister city" ties and "citizen diplomacy" to lobby Japanese boards of education not to adopt the book. Numerous Chinese and Japanese municipalities are linked as "friendship cities," but these Track 2 relationships are far more constrained.

Whereas exchanges between Korean and Japanese religious groups (mainly Buddhist but also Christian) have been important for the conscript remains issue, Chinese religious groups cannot operate independently of the state, which restricts the ability of even non-political groups to assemble. Freedom to criticize one's own government, and to sue it in court, has played a pivotal role in the Korean case. Civil lawsuits by citizens accusing their government of neglecting them prompted South Korea's release of the diplomatic records concerning the 1965 treaty; Chinese activists advocating such tactics would be promptly arrested. South Korean courts, in fact, have proven themselves to be the most independent in the region. Use of the internet, a technology the Chinese state is determined to control, has also been instrumental in South Korean democratization and forced labor activism. South Korea has liberalized its media in general by phasing out the press club system, while leading newspapers in Fukuoka and Busan have exchanged reporters through a "sister paper" program that has advanced mutual understanding even about divisive historical issues. Beijing has increased state control over the media in recent years and would not permit such unfiltered access to the Chinese public.

Acrimony with communist China over wartime history might be brushed aside by many Japanese with a certain degree of smugness, but the political symmetry and perception of shared values between South Korea and Japan means that Seoul's protests must be taken more seriously. The moral legitimacy of South Korea as a "reparations partner" is enhanced by the self-searching nature of the nation's truth commission process, which represents a flowering of historical memory and serves to raise the bars of truth telling and participatory democracy for Japan too. Indeed, the Korean forced labor redress movement, with its heavy political commitment by state actors and a nearly borderless Korean-Japanese civil society, may represent a new template for similar campaigns in the Asia Pacific region. But the model will not be easy to emulate. Decades of groundwork in Japan and South Korea, the fitful maturation of South Korean civil society and the spread of a global redress consciousness have all been necessary conditions.

6 Conclusion

The Chinese forced labor reparations movement is a unique lens for viewing some of the best and worst features of the postwar Japanese mode of coming to terms with the past at the citizen, state and corporate levels. It has been found that 1) the CFL claim has unique advantages as well as unique disadvantages; 2) the movement partially conforms to theoretical frameworks of the reparations process; and 3) the movement has been partially successful already according to some criteria of the process.

Reparations theorists stress the discreet nature of individual claims, making precise comparisons among cases difficult. Yet the Chinese forced labor claim would appear to be stronger and more potentially resolvable than most of the historical injustices repaired (either through compensation, apologies or other means) by mainly liberal democratic societies in recent years. The CFL claim involves detailed, unambiguous documentation of the forced deportations and forced labor that occurred in 1943-45. Adding to the sense of an injustice requiring rectification, the Japanese government and corporations secretly produced voluminous records after the war and then suppressed the information in order to evade accountability. Japanese courts have been unusually hospitable to the claim, producing four rulings in favor of Chinese plaintiffs and routinely finding that the state and industry jointly carried out an illegal forced labor scheme. The Tokyo government concedes the system was “half-forced,” representing an unusually strong admission of wrongdoing. The relatively small number of CFL victims (less than 40,000 originally, of whom perhaps 4,000 are still alive) also makes the injustice more resolvable than most.

However, the CFL reparations movement has clear disadvantages too. Foremost among these is the fundamental mismatch between the merits of the claim and the East Asian political context in which it is unfolding. The reparations norms envisioned by activists and some theorists have not taken sufficient root in the region, confining the movement to the least desirable judicial arena. In addition, Japan lacks a domestic consensus regarding memory of its wartime role, making all historical claims the subject of vigorous contestation. China’s authoritarian political system and the government’s weak support have limited the CFL redress movement’s capabilities. The thin state of Sino-Japanese historical reconciliation, along with the nations’ perceptions of each other as geopolitical rivals, complicates settlement of the claim.

Chinese forced labor redress partially conforms to theoretical frameworks of the reparations process. As applied to the theory of redress proposed by Roy Brooks (1999), the Chinese forced labor case meets the requirements for a “meritorious” claim. As applied to John Torpey’s reparations map (Torpey 2006, 50), the CFL movement has

made impressive progress in the outer ring activities related to communicative history, but progress within the innermost three rings (transitional justice, compensation, and apology/regret) has generally not occurred. Elazar Barkan (2001, 2006) offers a liberal vision of a “neo-Enlightenment morality” and “ethical imperative” that is not readily discernible in Japan or China, although such a mindset may be taking shape in South Korea.

In fact, CFL redress is making slow but steady progress and may be considered partially successful already. Reparations claims by their very existence represent important “conversations” with history and “negotiations” with the societies in which they are located. The vital reparations groundwork of historical consciousness-raising at the grassroots level has been accomplished through the sustained wave of lawsuits in Japan and could bear fruit over time. Memorials have been erected and solemn commemorations have been held at former CFL sites around the country, educating local residents about a wartime reality that had been nearly forgotten. For long-marginalized CFL survivors finally being given a public voice, both in China and Japan, empowerment and partial healing have occurred. The presence or absence of compensation should not be viewed as the sole criterion for evaluating redress campaigns, as is underscored by the relatively successful Korean forced labor reparations movement.

Future progress for Chinese forced labor redress will likely occur as the result of pragmatic, not moral, calculations by the Japanese government, Japanese corporations and the Chinese government. Under an optimistic scenario that is not imminent, the Japanese state and industry might eventually choose to set up a compensation fund based on self-interest. This might occur if a shifting calculus of costs and benefits related to economics, security and international reputation makes reparations less painful than perpetual intransigence. Losing Chinese market share, as the result of Chinese government action or consumer boycotts, would seriously hurt Japanese corporate balance sheets. A concrete step toward historical reconciliation would decrease military tensions and improve Japan’s image throughout the region. And unless China drops its objections, Tokyo’s desire for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council will remain blocked. Japan’s national aspirations for a leading role on the world stage are being hindered by the perception, caused largely by its inadequate approach to unresolved WWII issues, that it does not fully share the liberal values of other G7 nations.

Is deep reconciliation between Japan and China possible without reparations for Chinese forced labor and other exceptionally strong claims? The answer would appear to be no. This reality alone suggests that CFL redress will continue making headway.

Short-term pessimism is unavoidable, due to prevailing conditions in Japan as well as China. But over the medium and longer terms, as a prerequisite for reconciliation and based on the self-interests of various parties, settlement of the CFL claim in a manner at least partially satisfying to the Chinese government and society looks more likely. The future advance, or retreat, of the global reparations movement depends on the outcome of cases in non-Western settings, such as the campaigns involving Chinese and Korean forced labor.

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