

【論 文】

# What the Global Pandemic has Revealed about East Asia: From Mistrust to Empathy

CHI Naomi \*

## 1. Introduction:

The year 2020 kicked off like a b-rated horror movie—a global outbreak of an unknown virus that causes severe respiratory disease and death of those in the vulnerable category, no cure and vaccine available, and spreads through human contact. Currently, over 133 million people have been infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and over 2.9 million deaths have been recorded globally<sup>1)</sup>. While the origin of the virus is still not clearly known, a big cluster started in the city of Wuhan, China, which then spread to various countries in East Asia including Japan, Korea and Taiwan. One of the young staff working at the National Health Command Centre (NHCC) in Taiwan was following the news concerning the rapid increase of patients with an unknown respiratory disease in Wuhan and reported the case to its government as well as contacting the Chinese authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO). While Taiwan enforced strict screening inspections of travelers to and from Wuhan as early as January 2, on January 3 the Wuhan health authorities announced that there has been no human to human transmission, but by January 21 the Chinese authorities issued a statement concerning the human to human transmission of the virus and consequently put Wuhan under strict lockdown on January 23<sup>2)</sup>, almost 3 weeks after the Taiwanese authorities had contacted them. On January 30, 2020, the WHO finally declares the coronavirus outbreak a global health emergency, and furthermore that it is a “‘unprecedented outbreak’ that has been met with an ‘unprecedented response’”<sup>3)</sup>. At this point, WHO chief Tedros praised the “‘extraordinary measures’ Chinese authorities had taken and said there was no reason to limit trade or travel to China”<sup>4)</sup>. The WHO declared the coronavirus a pandemic on March 12<sup>5)</sup>.

---

\* Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public Policy, Hokkaido University.  
Email address: [n\\_chi@hops.hokudai.ac.jp](mailto:n_chi@hops.hokudai.ac.jp)

- 1) As of April 2021. Please refer to the Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 Dashboard at: <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>
- 2) “Coronavirus: What did China do about early outbreak?” *BBC News* (June 9, 2020) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-52573137> (last accessed on June 17, 2020).
- 3) “Coronavirus declared global health emergency by WHO,” *BBC News* (January 31, 2020) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51318246> (last accessed on June 17, 2020).
- 4) *Ibid.*

However, even before this declaration, Taiwan implemented their unique methods of prevention and quarantine, from strict screening at the airports, massive testing, quarantine and also closing its borders, while Korea also implemented strict measures such as massive testing (the infamous drive-through and walk-through testing), quarantine, setting up apps for smart phones and tracking people using IT technology as early as January, almost two months before the WHO declared the coronavirus a pandemic. Japan also seemingly successfully contained the virus through its unique methods of “warning” people to avoid the 3Cs (close contact, closed spaces and crowded places) and “requesting” restaurants and entertainment facilities to temporarily close their facilities until further notice.

While all three regions demonstrated their strengths in establishing and implementing measures to contain the virus in their respective countries, the fight against the coronavirus also clearly highlighted the weakness in this region: the lack of cooperation. First of all, Taiwan is not a member of the WHO, although it held an observer status until the inauguration of the Tsai administration in 2016. The foreign ministers of Japan and China held a ministerial conference call on April 21, followed by a conference call between the under-secretaries of Foreign Affairs on April 30. Moreover, the foreign ministers of Japan, Korea and China held a ministerial conference call back in March 20<sup>6)</sup> and promised to establish a health ministers’ meeting at the earliest convenience, but it was not held until May 15<sup>7)</sup>. The health ministers’ meeting started in 2007 and has been held every year since its implementation. The meeting was effective in sharing information during the breakout of the influenza virus in 2009, and in 2019, the ministers agreed to establish a hotline. However, some say that the reason for the lack of cooperation seen during the outbreak of coronavirus is due to the deterioration of relations among the three countries. Prof. Okonogi at Keio University states that, “It seems that the respective governments find it difficult to talk about mutual support and cooperation due to the possible negative reaction from its people, even though there is a framework to cooperate on public health issues.”<sup>8)</sup>

---

5) “WHO declares coronavirus a pandemic, urges aggressive action,” *Mainichi Shimbun* (March 12, 2020) <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20200312/p2g/00m/0in/014000c> (last accessed on June 17, 2020).

6) 「日中韓、早期に保健相会合：外相テレビ会議で一致」、『日本経済新聞』（2020年3月20日）<https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO57052040Q0A320C2EA3000/>（last accessed on June 17, 2020）.

7) 「コロナ対策巡り連携強化：日中韓保健相が共同声明」、『日本経済新聞』（2020年5月15日）<https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO59203590V10C20A5000000/>（last accessed on June 17, 2020）.

8) 「近隣国協力、感染症が盲点：日本、中韓との協力の距離」、『日本経済新聞』（2020年5月8日）<https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO58846850X00C20A5PP8000/>（last accessed on June 17, 2020）.

What the coronavirus global pandemic has revealed about East Asia is the passiveness or even the unwillingness to cooperate even in the face of a global public health emergency. For Taiwan, it is being denied membership to the international organization responsible for international public health that states its objective as, “the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.” The reason for Taiwan being locked out of membership is due to China’s insistence on the “one China principle.”<sup>9)</sup>

This article will put forth the idea of the politics of mistrust as the root cause of the bottleneck among East Asia countries, namely Japan and Korea. Moreover, it will examine the internal and external factors that lead to the mistrust, and attempt to explore ways in which Japan and Korea can “build” trust from bottom up, through reconciliation and empathy.

## 2. Politics of Mistrust: internal and external factors

Political trust is often times defined as, “citizens’ support for political institutions such as government and parliament in the face of uncertainty about or vulnerability to the actions of these institutions.”<sup>10)</sup> Political trust is considered as a pro-democratic value, but it is not a prerequisite to democracy; rather, skepticism stimulates engagement and people start to judge political institutions by their own merits<sup>11)</sup>. It entails the evaluation of the attributes that make political institutions trustworthy, such as credibility, fairness, competence and transparency<sup>12)</sup>.

In East Asia, political trust rates are higher in well-performing authoritarian regimes than in the democratic regimes of the region, however, the standards differ.<sup>13)</sup> Authoritarian regimes are judged mainly on their economic performance, whereas democratic regimes are evaluated based on democratic principles. What this suggests is that maintaining high levels of trust in non-democratic societies depends on continuous economic growth, while perceptions of corruption strongly and consistently undermine political trust in democratic regimes<sup>14)</sup>.

Liberal peace theory suggests that commitment to capitalist economic development will result in higher levels of market integration, domestic pluralism, and development of rule of law and democracy, and that development of regional institutions to consolidate these gains

---

9) Ben Blanchard, “Taiwan rejects China’s main condition for WHO participation,” *Reuters* (May 15, 2020) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-taiwan/taiwan-rejects-chinas-main-condition-for-who-participation-idUSKBN22R0HM> (last accessed on June 17, 2020).

10) Tom W. G. van der Meer, “Political Trust and the Crisis of Democracy,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (Oxford University Press, 2020) DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.

11) *Ibid.*

12) S. Zmerli S, “Political Trust,” in A.C. Michalos (eds) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Springer, Dordrecht, 2014) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5>.

13) C. Park, “Political trust in the Asia-Pacific region,” in S. Zmerli & T. W. G. van der Meer (Eds.), *Handbook on Political Trust* (Chelton, U.K.: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016).

14) E. C. C. Chang and Y. Chu, “Corruption and Trust: Exceptionalism in Asian Democracies?” *Journal of Politics* (Vol. 68, No. 2, 2006), pp. 259–271.

ensue political and peaceful stability<sup>15)</sup>. However, regional integrative agendas in East Asia have not advanced very much<sup>16)</sup>. Moreover, over the past few years, East Asia has witnessed a resurgence of nationalism, skepticism towards democratic pluralism, emergence of autocratic leadership and the reactivation of the conflict regarding the historical past and memories between Japan and Korea and China<sup>17)</sup>. These undermine and challenge the notion predicted by liberal peace theory that economic interdependence and frequent exchanges of people and goods lead to peace, stability and consequently mutual trust.

## 2.1 Mistrust in Japan and Korea: internal factors

While Japan and Korea are economically developed countries, both still have their share of economic, political and social challenges. In both countries, people have become skeptical of their own government's ability to facilitate growth and at the same time address issues such as precarity, inequality, marginalization and corruption as well as dealing with national/global risks (i.e. the coronavirus pandemic). This section will focus on the domestic challenges that lead to the mistrust of each respective governments.

First and foremost, both Japan and Korea suffer from precarity and inequality among the vulnerable categories including youth and elderly people. In the last few years, both Japan and Korea have witnessed the increase of the “underclass”. The underclass is sometimes defined as those who are unemployed<sup>18)</sup>. For a more concrete definition, they are defined as a group of people living in poverty<sup>19)</sup> who are not included in society due to dependency on state benefits, denial of work ethics, failed morality and rejection of family norms<sup>20)</sup>, those who are not involved in production work or excluded from the labour market system, the young and homeless may also be referred to as the underclass<sup>21)</sup>. The collapse of the middle class is not a phenomenon unique to the West but also in East Asia. It is manifested in the increase in youth poverty, working poor, bipolarization of class and low-skilled foreign migrant workers.

One of the common features of the underclass is that they are unable to escape from

---

15) K. Clements, “Trust, Identity, and Conflict in Northeast Asia: Barriers to Positive Relationships,” in K. Clements (eds) *Identity, Trust and Reconciliation in East Asia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) pp. 1-28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54897-5>.

16) Sorpong Peou (eds), *Human Security in East Asia: Challenges for Collaborative Action* (New York and Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2009), pp. 142-154.

17) *Op. cit.* Clements.

18) Gunnar Myrdal, *Challenge to Affluence* (New York: Pantheon, 1962).

19) Poverty is defined as not having enough money or access to resources to enjoy a decent standard of living; be that the lack of access to healthcare, education or water and sanitation facilities, among others.

20) Ken Auletta, *The Underclass* (New York: Random House, 1983).

21) John Muncie, *Youth and Crime: Radical and Realist Criminology* (London: Sage publications, 1999).

poverty. For example, the passive poor who are long term welfare recipients (elderly or single mothers), poor youth and migrant workers dependent on precarious work (sometimes involved in underground economy, sex industry or crime), or those who have been traumatised (the homeless, drifters, substance abuse, mental illness). Scholars have tried to put their finger on the causes of the rising underclass in the West, for example, Giddens believes that the underclass are vulnerable people unable to find secure jobs. He sees this as a consequence of the dual labour market, where there are high paid stable jobs on one hand and low paid insecure jobs on the other<sup>22</sup>).

In Japan, the relative poverty rate<sup>23</sup> is at 16%, second highest among OCED countries.<sup>24</sup> When one looks at the poverty rate for single households, the poverty rate of single male is at 25% while single female is at 32% (ages 20-64)<sup>25</sup>. In terms of job categories, 78.8% of men work full time compared to 44.7% of women who work full time, while 21.2% of men work part time compared to 55.3% of women who work part time<sup>26</sup>. When looking at child poverty rate in Japan, it is at 13.9%<sup>27</sup>. There is a strong correlation with the poverty rate of single mother which is at 50%<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, 36% of single mother household reported that they had experienced food shortage<sup>29</sup>. Another set of interesting data is the correlation between poverty and education, as children in the lower socio-economic status (SES) do not perform in the standardized tests as well as those in higher SES. Experts say that this may be due to the difference in investment toward private education (cram schools, prep schools)<sup>30</sup>. Moreover,

- 
- 22) Anthony Giddens, *Sociology: Class, Stratification and Inequality 4th ed.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).
- 23) Relative poverty is when households receive 50% less than average household incomes, so they do have some money but still not enough money to afford anything above the basics. This type of poverty is, on the other hand, changeable depending on the economic growth of the country.
- 24) OECD Income Distribution Database (IDD), <https://www.oecd.org/social/income-distribution-database.htm> (last accessed on June 21, 2020).
- 25) 「単身女性の32% 「貧困」、男性は25%：人口問題研」、『日本経済新聞』（2012年2月8日）  
[https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNASDG08001\\_Y2A200C1CR0000/](https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXNASDG08001_Y2A200C1CR0000/) (last accessed on June 21, 2020).
- 26) 厚生労働省、「国民生活基礎調査」<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/20-21.html> (last accessed on June 21, 2020) and 「男性21.2%、女性55.3%は非正規…就業者の正規・非正規率をさぐる（2019年公開版）」（2019年7月27日）<https://news.yahoo.co.jp/byline/fuwarai/20190727-00134317/> (last accessed on June 21, 2020).
- 27) 内閣府、「子供の貧困に関する現状」[https://www8.cao.go.jp/kodomonohinkon/youshikisyak\\_9/pdf/s2.pdf](https://www8.cao.go.jp/kodomonohinkon/youshikisyak_9/pdf/s2.pdf) (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 28) 厚生労働省、「全国ひとり人親世帯等調査」<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/86-1.html> (last accessed June 23, 2020) .
- 29) 人口問題研究所、「生活と支え合いに関する調査」<http://www.ipss.go.jp/ss-seikatsu/j/2017/seikatsu2017summary.pdf> (last accessed on June 21, 2020).
- 30) 松本健太郎「G7で2番目に高い日本の相対的貧困率：そこで何が起きている?」、『日経ビジネス』（2019年11月19日）<https://business.nikkei.com/atcl/seminar/19/00067/111200016/?P=4> (last accessed on June 22, 2020).

numbers indicate the children whose parents' income is high has a better chance of going to university<sup>31)</sup>. While the national average of children going to university in Japan was 73 % in 2019, the average for children in single parent household was 58%, and the average for children with parents receiving social welfare was 35%<sup>32)</sup>.

In Korea, the relative poverty rate in 2017 was 17.4%<sup>33)</sup>. Homelessness has become a serious social issue as Ministry of Welfare states that there are over 11000 homeless people in Korea<sup>34)</sup>. In Korea, the poverty rate of those in the age bracket of 66-75 is at 40%, while those in the age range of 18-25 is at 13.1%<sup>35)</sup>. These young people and elderly living in poverty often live in small confined cubicle homes called *Jjokbang* and *Goshiwon* that is no bigger than 6.6 sq. metres in size and rent costing approximately 300,000~400,000 won (300~400 US dollars). The elderly are often unemployed or work one day or temporary jobs to make ends meet, while the young people work in precarious jobs called “platform labour” which are non-skilled jobs including delivery, domestic work, pet-sitter, chauffeur and small errands, where labour is achieved through intermediary platforms such as mobile apps<sup>36)</sup>. Platform workers (agents) work under poor conditions, and they are excluded from being protected by various labour laws, including rules on minimum wage, since they are not legally recognized as ‘workers,’ placing them in a blind spot of the social safety net<sup>37)</sup>. These young people often refer to themselves as “dirt spoons” or born in low income-family families who have given up on social mobility (this is juxtaposed with gold spoon or born in wealthy families)<sup>38)</sup>. These disenfranchised, despondent youths in Korea feel the “reformist president, who promised to bring social and economic justice, has failed them.”<sup>39)</sup>

- 
- 31) 東京大学 大学経営・政策研究センター「高校生の進路と親の年収の関連について」  
<http://ump.p.u-tokyo.ac.jp/crump/resource/crump090731.pdf> (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 32) *Opt cit.*, 内閣府.
- 33) 「빈곤층 줄었다지만...韓 상대적빈곤율 OECD 최고수준」, 『세계일보』 (Dec. 12, 2018)  
<https://www.sedaily.com/NewsView/1S8JEGE07V> (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 34) 「전국 노숙인 1만1000여명...복지부 첫 실태조사」, 『경향신문』 (Sept. 27, 2017)  
[http://news.khan.co.kr/kh\\_news/khan\\_art\\_view.html?art\\_id=201709271339001#csidxf6361e54cf8b4fe894437df5b8e687d](http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201709271339001#csidxf6361e54cf8b4fe894437df5b8e687d) (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 35) 「젊은층 빈곤인구가 늘고 있다...”사회적 좌절 막아야”」, 『뉴시스』 (May 5, 2019).  
[https://newsis.com/view/?id=NISX20190503\\_0000640861](https://newsis.com/view/?id=NISX20190503_0000640861) (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 36) “Platform Labor, Innovation or Illegal?”, *The Korea Bizwire* (Nov. 8, 2019) <http://koreabizwire.com/platform-labor-innovation-or-illegal/147432> (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 37) *Ibid.*
- 38) “South Korea’s disadvantaged ‘dirt spoons’ rail against President Moon Jae-in,” *South China Morning Post* (Nov. 29, 2019) <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/3039532/south-koreas-disadvantaged-dirt-spoons-rail-against-president> (last accessed on June 22, 2020).
- 39) *Ibid.*

## 2.2 Mistrust (Distrust) between Japan and Korea: external factors

2019 marked the centennial of the anti-colonial March First Independence Movement, and 7.4 million ethnic Koreans worldwide celebrated the occasion. In Korea, the celebration kicked off with President Moon Jaein's speech celebrating the "centennial of the birth of the republic<sup>40</sup>." Ordinary citizens took the streets to celebrate the occasion, including students from the Ewha Women's University that marched for the recognition of women activists during the independence movement, while the former comfort women living at the House of Sharing (나눔의집) held a "memorial service for the victims of Japanese sexual slavery."<sup>41</sup> 101 years later and after normalizing its relations in 1965, the relationship between the two countries are at its worst.

The relationship between the two countries have no doubt deteriorated in the last decade, mostly due to the long standing historical and territorial disputes including issues of history textbooks, "comfort women", forced labour and Dokdo/Takeshima. However, in the last year, these historical and territorial disputes have sparked a new trade war between the two countries.

The trade war started from July 2019, when Japan's trade ministry introduced new licensing requirements on exports of three chemicals that South Korea needs to manufacture high-tech products like semiconductors and display panels<sup>42</sup>. Japan claimed that this was necessary to prevent sensitive materials from being shipped illegally to North Korea for military use, but South Korea called the justification groundless and consumers launched a boycott of Japanese goods, from beer to clothing<sup>43</sup>. Japan further raised the temperature in the trade war by removing South Korea's fast-track export status, making it the first country to be excluded from Japan's "white list" of destinations approved for the sale of sensitive materials<sup>44</sup>. Many South Koreans believe that Japan's move was a retaliation to the ruling by South Korea's highest court in 2018 ordering Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to compensate victims of forced labour and seizing their assets for liquidation<sup>45</sup>.

40) 「文대통령 100주년 3·1절 기념사 전문」, 『조선일보』 (March 1, 2019) [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2019/03/01/2019030101018.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2019/03/01/2019030101018.html) (last accessed on June 22, 2020).

41) 「경기·인천 곳곳에서 3.1절 100주년 기념행사」, 『KBS News』 (March 1, 2019) <https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=4148677> (last accessed on June 22, 2020).

42) Jong-Wha Lee, "Saving the Japan-South Korea relationship," *The Japan Times* (Oct. 4, 2019) <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/10/04/commentary/japan-commentary/saving-japan-south-korea-relationship/> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).

43) Ibid.

44) Ji-Hyun Kim and David Ho, "Decades of distrust: Japanese firms may suffer in South Korea row," *Aljazeera* (Aug. 6, 2019) <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/decades-distrust-japanese-firms-suffer-south-korea-row-190722141650254.html> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).

45) Josh Doyle, "Decades of distrust: South Koreans angry at Japan's export curbs," *Aljazeera* (July 22, 2019) <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/decades-distrust-south-koreans-angry-japan-export-curbs->

In a recent opinion poll conducted by the Japanese Asahi Shimbun and South Korea's Hankook Ilbo in 2019, 74% of Japanese distrusted Koreans, while 75% of Koreans distrusted Japanese; some 83% of Japanese respondents thought bilateral relations were bad, up from 63% in 2018, while 82% Koreans thought the same, up from 69% in 2018<sup>46)</sup>.

Many are concerned that while historical disputes were always dealt with denial or criticism, it remained in the realm of "historical disputes," however, the recent developments demonstrate that both parties will no longer hesitate to take matters "beyond history." After the court ruling on forced labour, Tokyo "retaliated" with trade-curbing measures, which then was met with Seoul's decision to end the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), although Seoul did reverse its decision to extend it in November 2019. The outbreak of the coronavirus halted any action since, but the two countries are back in the ring again as Korea has decided to reopen its complaint over Japan's trade curb with the WTO<sup>47)</sup>. As Japan and Korea have descended into a vicious cycle of criticism<sup>48)</sup> and "retaliation," the diplomatic dispute between the two countries are reflected in personal attitude.

### 3. Reconciliation and Empathy: Possible solutions?

Reconciliation can be defined in various ways, but the simple definition of the word is the settlement of unbalanced records and restoration of mutual trust<sup>49)</sup>. It is also an agreement to amicable truce, rapprochement and reestablishment of friendship<sup>50)</sup>. In reality, reconciliation may only be the state of reduced tension in experiential terms<sup>51)</sup>, but what is important in the process of reconciliation is the negotiation and compromise between the victim and the assailant<sup>52)</sup>, and ultimately "forgiveness".

There is a wealth of literature on reconciliation in East Asia, varying from works on coping

---

190722034340776.html (last accessed on June 23, 2020).

- 46) Julian Ryall, "3 in 4 Japanese distrust South Koreans – and the feeling's mutual," *South China Morning Post* (June 12, 2019) <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/3014195/3-4-japanese-distrust-south-koreans-and-feelings-mutual> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).
- 47) Tong-Hyong Kim, "South Korea to Reopen WTO Complaint Over Japan Trade Curbs," *The Diplomat* (June 3, 2020) <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/south-korea-to-reopen-wto-complaint-over-japan-trade-curbs/> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).
- 48) "Japan and South Korea must end the cycle of distrust," *Nikkei Asian Review* (Feb. 20, 2019) <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-Nikkei-View/Japan-and-South-Korea-must-end-the-cycle-of-distrust> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).
- 49) C. Villa-Vicencio and W.J. Verwoerd (eds), *Looking Back, Reaching Forward: Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation of South Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, Press, 2000). P. 28.
- 50) M.H. Ross, "Ritual and Politics of Recognition," in Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (ed), *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). pp. 197-224.
- 51) Yinan He, "Comparing Post-War (West) Germany-Polish and Sino-Japanese Reconciliation: A Bridge too Far?" *Europe-Asia Studies* (Vol. 64, No. 7, 2011) pp. 1159-1161.
- 52) Mikyoung Kim (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Memory and Reconciliation in East Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2016). p. 2.



with domestic trauma (i.e. sexual assault, cold war wounds), focusing on bilateral conflicts, comparing the East Asian case with Europe, as well as those that take a more normative approach from the perspective of justice<sup>53</sup>). This article does not claim new insight, but another important process of reconciliation that must take place in both Japan and Korea is the reconciliation within each respective country.

In Korea, the reconciliation between the conservative and the progressive camps of society must be prioritized. There is still unresolved animosity between the two camps, including the 4.3 Jeju Massacre (1948-1949), 5.18 Kwangju Massacre (1987), Bodo League Massacre (1950) where the conservative regime at the time were responsible of killing civilians that they deemed to be “communist.” The recent scandal concerning the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance and former “comfort woman” and victim Lee Yong-Soo is a prime example of how this domestic cleavage has become detrimental to any progress that has been made in the reconciliation of domestic trauma of sexual slavery. Reactions to this scandal have been polarized between the right and left, especially since the former head of the Council, Yoon Mee-Hyang, is a newly elected lawmaker in the country’s governing party<sup>54</sup>). Many are aware of the interest taken by Japanese conservative nationalists in this affair. The most disappointing aspect of this scandal is that the Korean Council’s leadership has a vested interest in undermining reconciliatory actions that could benefit the former comfort women<sup>55</sup>).

Similar cleavage exists in Japan too, where the nationalistic revisionist right is constantly undermining the liberal left. Nakano argues that, “the New Right transformation of Japanese politics –the combined ascendancy of economic liberalism and political illiberalism—is the driving force of contemporary nationalism in Japan<sup>56</sup>). A prime example of this divide in Japan

---

53) Some of the works include (and not exhaustive): David Crocker, “Reckoning with Past Wrongs: A Normative Approach,” *Ethics and International Affairs* (Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999); Francois Jullien, *On the Universal, the Uniform, the Common and Dialogue between Cultures* (New York: Polity, 2014); Mikyoung Kim and Barry Schwartz, *Northeast Asia’s Difficult Past: Essays on Collective Memory* (London: Palgrave, 2010); G.W. Shin and D.C. Sneider, “Historical Wars Northeast Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* ( April 10, 2014); T. Hasegawa and K Togo (eds), *East Asia’s Haunted Present: Historical Memories and the Resurgence of Nationalism* (Westport: Praeger, 2008); 天兒慧、李鍾元編、『東アジア：和解の道』(岩波書店、2016年)；和田春樹、川島真 et al., 『東アジア近現代通史、上・下』(岩波現代全書、2014年) among others.

54) Shawn O’Dwyer, “The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance has lost its way,” *The Japan Times* (June 1, 2020) <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/06/01/commentary/korean-council-justice-remembrance-lost-way/#.XvWZPkBuJ9B> (last accessed on June 23, 2020). The popularity of the book “Anti-Japanese Tribalism” and “Struggle Against Anti-Japanese Tribalism” by Rhee Young-Hoon is also another example of this deep cleavage between the left and right that seemingly hinders the relations with Japan. See also “S. Korean, Japanese far right exploits Yoon Mee-hyang controversy to rewrite historical narrative,” *Hankyoreh* (May 21, 2020) [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/945960.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/945960.html) (last accessed on June 23, 2020).

55) Ibid.

56) Koichi Nakano, “Contemporary Political Dynamics of Japanese Nationalism,” *The Asia-Pacific*

is concerning the former Asahi Shimbun reporter, Takashi Uemura, who wrote articles on Kim Hak-Sun, the first “comfort woman” to tell her story. These articles were attacked by Japanese nationalists, including Tsutomu Nishioka, who wrote an article in *Bunge Shunju*, and accusing Uemura of fabricating the comfort woman story. From the mid-2000s, when the Action Conservative movement (Kodo-suru Hoshu), such as the Citizens' Group Refusing to Tolerate Special Rights for Koreans in Japan (*Zainichi Tokken wo Yurusanai Shimin no Kai*, better known as *Zaitokukai*), arose, online-based criticism of Uemura spread to the streets, taking the form of demonstrations and rallies. In these rallies, Uemura's name and photo were often used on placards carried by activists, with phrases such as “fabricator” and “traitor.” More than anyone else, Uemura has been the core target of attacks by groups ranging from mainstream conservatives to so-called *Netto Uyoku* or *NetoUyo* (Internet Far Right), as a representative symbol of “the evil” of the Asahi Shimbun<sup>57)</sup>.

Just these individual cases alone illustrate the difficulty in advancing reconciliation between Japan and Korea, but what is important is that reconciliation takes place not only between the two countries but within each country as well. Healing nor reconciliation do not happen overnight, rather it is a long process that must be continued with tenacity. The next question then is, how should we continue the process of healing and reconciliation? The answer may lie in the idea of empathy.

The idea of empathy is not a new concept, rather, it has been used in the context of trust and confidence building. Empathy is best understood as the capacity to understand another’s view of the world, to walk in another’s shoes and to understand and share another’s experience and emotions<sup>58)</sup>. On a national level, countries could benefit from “empathy building measures”<sup>59)</sup> with continued bilateral or multilateral dialogues among former and current decision makers, role playing exercises and simulations. On the grassroots level, the activities of one particular social enterprise may be worth sharing. Hidden Taipei is a social enterprise working with vulnerably housed people. It is designed after the Unseen Tours in the UK, which also provides tours from a different and unique perspective. Both Hidden Taipei and

---

*Journal-Japan Focus* (Vol. 14, Issue 20, No. 6, 2015) <https://apjff.org/-Nakano-Koichi/4965/article.pdf> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).

- 57) Uemura Takashi and Tomomi Yamaguchi, “Labeled the reporter who “fabricated” the comfort woman issue: A Rebuttal,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal-Japan Focus* (Vol. 13, Issue 2, No. 1, 2015) <https://apjff.org/-Uemura-Takashi--Tomomi-Yamaguchi/4249/article.pdf> (last accessed on June 23, 2020).
- 58) Paul Evans, “Cooperative Security 2.0: Recasting the East Asian Security Order,” *Global Asia* 11(No. 1, Spring 2016).
- 59) David Welch, “The Trust Deficit and How to Fix it,” *Global Asia* 11 (No. 1, Spring 2016); and “Crisis Management Mechanisms: Pathologies and Pitfalls,” CIGI Papers no.40 (September 2014) <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/crisis-management-mechanisms-pathologies-and-pitfalls>.

Unseen Tours support the vulnerably housed individuals to develop, curate, and lead guided walks to different neighbourhoods of Taipei and London, respectively. Both enterprises are not on a poverty tourism agenda, but rather, to show people the historical and cultural quirks in an unusual and entertaining way, linking them to current affairs and social injustice. Such kind of social enterprise could pose as a model for empathy building measures on a more grassroots level.

#### 4. Tentative Conclusion

Faced with various social and economic issues, political leaders in Japan and Korea have sought to divert people's attention from domestic issues by resorting to nationalistic narratives that conjure up painful memories of the past. In the context of East Asian international relations, scholars such as Jennifer Lind<sup>60</sup>) and Yoshihide Soeya have emphasized the low level of trust Asian states show each other, especially towards Japan, and Soeya argues that this is due to the "perceptual trust gap" and Japan's failure to come to terms with its colonial and wartime history<sup>61</sup>). However, in both Japan and Korea, the public backlash especially towards the "comfort women" and forced labourers issue was triggered more by the distrust in its own government rather than the distrust towards each other. Therefore, in terms of trust building in East Asia, both Japan and Korea must start to deal with the mistrust that lies within. Moreover, it is crucial to continue the process of reconciliation between and among the East Asian countries, but this paper has argued that reconciliation must also start from within. To start this process, the concept of empathy is not only useful but an essential tool to not agree but rather understand each other's different perspectives. Officials, politicians, decision makers, academics as well as ordinary citizens must continue to revisit one's own history and publicize the positive rather than the negative.

---

60) Jennifer Lind, "Democratization and Stability in East Asia," *International Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 55, No. 2, June 2011), pp. 409-436.

61) Yoshihide Soeya, "The Evolution of Japan's Public Diplomacy: Haunted by its Past History," in Jan Melissen and Yul Sohn (eds.), *Understanding Public Diplomacy in East Asia: Middle Powers in a Troubled Region* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

# What the Global Pandemic has Revealed about East Asia: From Mistrust to Empathy

CHI Naomi

## Abstract

The year 2020 kicked off like a b-rated horror movie—a global outbreak of an unknown virus that causes severe respiratory disease and death of those in the vulnerable category, no cure and vaccine available, and spreads through human contact. While all regions demonstrated their strengths in establishing and implementing measures to contain the virus in their respective countries, it has also clearly highlighted the weakness in this region: the lack of cooperation.

Experts have indicated that the reason for the lack of cooperation seen during the outbreak of coronavirus is due to the deterioration of relations among the East Asian countries. Prof. Okonogi at Keio University states that, “It seems that the respective governments find it difficult to talk about mutual support and cooperation due to the possible negative reaction from its people, even though there is a framework to cooperate on public health issues.” What the coronavirus global pandemic has revealed about East Asia is the passiveness or even the unwillingness to cooperate even in the face of a global public health emergency.

This article will put forth the idea of the politics of mistrust as the root cause of the bottleneck among East Asia countries, namely Japan and Korea. Moreover, it will examine the internal and external factors that lead to the mistrust, and attempt to explore ways in which Japan and Korea can “build” trust from bottom up, through reconciliation and empathy.

## Keywords

East Asia, Global pandemic, COVID-19, mistrust, empathy, reconciliation