

## What were some of the major political, economic, and social effects of Japan's occupation of Korea from the late 1800s until 1945?

### Introduction

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Japan became a rising power in the Asian region, increasing conflicts with Russia and China while a weaker Korea attempted to remain neutral. Japan further solidified their power and influence in the region after defeating China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, and Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. In 1910, Japan officially took control of Korea when the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was signed. The first article of the treaty proclaimed that the Emperor of Korea "makes the complete and permanent cession" of all rights and sovereignty over Korea to the Emperor of Japan. This marked the beginning of Japanese occupation of Korea and consequent destruction of Korean culture. Japan's occupation of Korea has left lasting political, economic and social consequences on both North and South Korea, and is still relevant today. Some of the controversial topics include social and political issue of comfort women, and the political and economic disputes surrounding apologies and compensations for Japanese occupation.

### Reparation and Apologies

One of the major political and social consequences of Japanese occupation is the reparation and apology issue, which is still brought up by both South Korean and Japanese politicians as a point of contention. With Both South Korea and Japan making contradicting statements, this issue continues to create diplomatic tension between the two states. Japan often cites that the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea should have solved any compensation issues (Hornung 2012; Torres 2013). In the 1965 Treaty, South Korea agreed to demand no further compensation after receiving \$800 million, in grants and soft loans, from Japan (Arai 2007; Card 2005). However, South Korea still argues that they weren't adequately compensated. Some Japanese politicians' insensitive statements regarding Korean issues and the continuing visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, where war criminals are also honoured as "Martyrs of Showa" (Card 2005), fuel the accusation that Japan is insincere in its attempt to reconcile. Furthermore, Japan's constantly changing official view of the comfort women issue adds to the list of major political and social effects left by the Japanese occupation.

The major conflict regarding the compensation issue is that while South Korea did receive the \$800 million, the government under Park Chung-hee only paid out "2.56 billion won to families killed by the Japanese and 6.6 billion won to owners of destroyed property" (Card 2005). The rest of the grants were mostly used for economic development while the thousands of South Korean citizens conscripted into the Japanese military and labour workforce received no compensation (Card 2005). No compensation from the 1965 Treaty went to the comfort women either. Although Japan did start a fund to compensate comfort women in 1994, it remained controversial (*Establishment of the AW Fund, and the basic nature of its projects* 2007; Hogg 2007). On one hand, to get the 1965 Treaty through, the grants were "explained to the Diet as *not* reparations" (Arai 2007), but money to aid economic cooperation between South Korea and Japan. This leaves the exact state of compensations ambiguous in Japanese politics. On the other hand, while South Korean government viewed the grants as reparations from Japan, they limited access to the compensation and barred victims of atomic bombs, those who were left in Sakhalin and comfort women from being eligible (Arai 2007). Both sides' ambiguous approach to reparation is a key reason why South Korean citizens still consider this to be an ongoing political and social issue. Arguably, they have a very good reason to be, considering Japan's actions and stance on the occupation of Korea is inconsistent; judging from Japan insisting on the validity of the Annexation Treaty, the politicians' constantly shifting views on comfort women and continuing visits to Yasukuni Shrine (Arai 2007; Card 2005).

For North Korea, similar issues arise regarding the grants given by the Japanese government as part of the normalisation negotiations. Relations with North Korea are more visibly hostile as Japan and North Korea "have not established official relations" since 1948 and normalisation talks have been on and off (Manyin 2001). Once again, Japan refused to label the monetary grants as compensation and did not meet North Korea's demand for a formal "legally binding apology" (Manyin 2001). Neither country have officially disclosed the sum of the grants given during

the 1965 settlement talks (Manyin 2001) and this ambiguity further adds to the demand that Japan make official compensations for its occupation of Korea. North Korea is also demanding formal recognition and compensation for the women forced into sexual slavery to be included in normalisation negotiations (Manyin 2001). While Prime Minister Koizumi had taken a more liberal and less hardline approach to relations with North Korea, North Korea's refusal to discontinue their nuclear testing programs and unwillingness to disclose information on the abductions of Japanese citizens has put heavy strains on their political and diplomatic relations (Wada 2012) Japan has adopted more cautious approach to relations with North Korea and negotiations were shelved from 2006 until recently. With the relations between the two countries cold and largely undisclosed, this issue will continue to be contentious.

### **Comfort Women**

The issue of comfort women remain controversial because some Japanese historians and politicians have publically denied the coercion aspect of the recruitment, choosing to describe the women as willing, instead of forced into sexual slavery (Arai 2007; Card 2005; Hogg 2007).

In 1993, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono released a statement acknowledging the Japanese Imperial Armies' involvement in coercing and forcing women into sexual slavery during World War II. As a further response, in 1994, Prime Minister Murayama issued an apology regarding the comfort women issue and established the Asian Women's Fund as a way to provide compensation for comfort women from South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, the Netherlands, and Indonesia (*Establishment of the AW Fund, and the basic nature of its projects* 2007; Wada 2008). The fund was dissolved in 2007. One of the biggest criticisms of this fund was that it wasn't a state compensation and thus not "official" enough (Hogg 2007). Haruki Wada, the fund's executive director explained that \$4.7 million dollars was raised in donations which were given to the victims, \$6.5 million were from taxpayer's money and went towards medical fees, and \$3.1 million went into building medical facilities in Indonesia instead of compensating the victims there (Hogg 2007). The victims criticised this fund as a way for the government to run away from taking full responsibility and make an official apology and state compensation. The letter of apology by the Prime Minister, given to the victims who received compensation was seen as a personal apology from Prime Minister Murayama, instead of an official one from the state (Hogg 2007). This argument was further supported by the countermovement in 2006 that sought to deny the comfort women issue and went as far as advocate for the withdrawal of the Kono Statement (Wada 2008).

With the current Prime Minister Abe at the forefront of a nationalistic movement to deny the issue of comfort women and "restore Japan's honour", this issue continues to be a controversial political and social consequence of Japanese occupation of Korea (Kotler 2014; McNeill 2014). Until Japan could give a consistent and unambiguous apology and compensation, this issue would not be resolved and both Koreas would continue to bring it up as a point of contention. The fact that to receive the compensation from the Asian Women's Fund, the women had to come out as comfort women and yet receive discrimination and accusations that denied their suffering, further deepens the trauma and harm they've suffered, and creates a lasting social issue that has yet to be addressed.

### **Conclusion**

The Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945 has left many social, political and economic consequences on both North and South Korea. Many of the issues remain unresolved and a controversial point that affects diplomatic relations between Japan and the Koreas. While in some cases, such as the reparation issue, Japan is not the only contributor to the issue at hand, the social consequences of the unresolved comfort women issue adds to the view that Japan is unwilling to acknowledge the harm and atrocities they've committed during both the occupation of Korea, as well as WWII.

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