Introduction

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In 1950, history seemed all but forgotten as the specter of communism hung ominously over Northeast Asia. The Chinese Communist Party had just fought its way to power in a revolution aimed at sweeping aside history, especially Confucianism, which was seen as leaving China backward and ill prepared to rise up and modernize. The Korean War had turned Koreans away from memories of the past that united them to a fateful choice about their future as part either of the wave of communism or of the U.S.-led "free world" bloc. In Japan, preparations were under way for the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which focused on putting aside the legacy of Japan's colonialism and wars in order to rebuild as part of the U.S.-led bloc. Large numbers of Chinese, Japanese, and South Koreans were inclined to condemn their past for the sorrows and weakness it had brought; few defended it. With their eyes on modernity, which leaves the past behind, Americans were eager to embrace a democratic Japan and South Korea while condemning communist states that were seen as rejecting both their own traditions and the promise of the free market and free world.

In 2010, the specter of history is hanging over Northeast Asia, but a struggle lies ahead. Confusion reigns as to what is the true threat from historical legacies and memory. Over the previous decade, concern centered on Japanese revisionism, defending the conduct of Japan in 1895–1945 in a manner that offends its neighbors. Yet, that issue was framed too narrowly, missing the problem of Japanese-U.S. historical differences, which is no less explosive. Attention turned to South Korean refocusing on history, galvanized by progressives led by President Roh Moo-hyun, who were incensed by Japan's view of history. Yet, the broader sweep of

South Korea's rediscovery of history was overlooked, both the incendiary problem of historical differences with the United States and an abrupt awakening to the prospect of clashing Chinese historical views. Indeed, of all historical memory challenges, the least noted but potentially most serious may be sinocentrism, with China influenced by old ways of thinking about its place in Asia both threatening the U.S. role in the region as if it signifies hegemonism – heir to imperialism – and arousing fears in neighboring states that this outlook could serve as a rationale for Chinese hegemonism. In a span of two decades, successive reinterpretations of history in Japan, South Korea, and China have alarmed neighbors and posed an unexpected challenge to U.S. thinking.

During the cold war, narrowing differences over historical issues was postponed. The Yoshida Doctrine called on Japan to rely on U.S. leadership in order to give priority to economic development without becoming sidetracked with historical differences. The anticommunism of leaders such as President Park Chung-hee also led to setting aside differences with the United States over history while agreeing to normalization with Japan without any resolution of the aroused grievances of the Korean people. In China too, history had little place except as part of anti-imperialist rhetoric in pursuit of revolutionary causes favored by Mao Zedong's brand of communism. When Deng Xiaoping redirected China onto the path of reform socialism, he was also loath to dwell on historical memories. It mostly sufficed to highlight "friendship" relations with Japan and pragmatic U.S. ties. In Jiang Zemin, Abe Shinzo, and Roh Moo-hyun, we find leaders emboldened to raise the profile of history disputes, but even they hesitated to widen the scope in order to reflect the full extent and intensity of simmering historical memories. Despite new leadership committed to managing some of the most combustible memories – President Hu Jintao in facing Japanese revisionism after Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's annual Yasukuni Shrine visits, President Lee Myung-bak in facing the same challenge, and Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio's promise to avoid similar provocations – emotions centered on history issues could erupt anew, expressing long-suppressed grievances against the United States and rekindled grievances against China. In the 1990s and 2000s, preoccupation with Japan served as a ready outlet for a range of views about historical injustice that may take different forms in the coming decades.

Visiting China, President Barack Obama in November 2009 stressed common interests, while affirming U.S. values. Although history was not in the forefront during his visit, many issues had a historical component.

On climate change, the Chinese insisted that the Western industrialized states were responsible for the problem due to past neglect, and therefore must bear the costs of new global environmental initiatives. On Tibet and Xinjiang, China blamed outside interference, following a longstanding pattern, for threats to their sovereignty, appealing for new commitments at odds with human rights concerns. While the Taiwan issue seemed to be under control, given the cooperative approach of President Ma Ying-jeou, this remained the foremost difference in historical thinking, and the prospect of a major U.S. arms sale to Taiwan as well as a calculation in China that Ma would not move beyond trade talks to political talks could enflame the atmosphere. More immediate were differences over how to deal with North Korea's nuclear weapons threat, as the Chinese put this in a different historical context and sought a softer approach that some regarded as sinocentric in spirit, solidifying Chinese influence over the peninsula. Japan and South Korea perceived a growing challenge from sinocentrism, and the United States needed to recognize it as well in pursuit of a cohesive strategy that would prevent a rising China from forging exclusive regionalism in an East Asian community. History was now an unmistakable battleground for arguments directed toward the reorganization of Asia.

Various historical grievances are coming to the forefront. Claiming to speak for developing countries, China accuses the industrialized states of irresponsible ravaging of our common heritage. Returning to the theme of anti-imperialism, reinforced by critiques of antihegemonism, China is also renewing its denunciation of the unjust world order that evolved in modern times. With calls for Obama to visit Hiroshima gaining ground in Japanese diplomatic circles, the debate over World War II is heating up too. Unlike the rancorous recent charges about history centered on Japan, notably in 2005, the scope has widened and the United States is deeply implicated. History has returned to the spotlight.

U.S. officials and academics have often steered clear of history issues as someone else's problem. They have counseled Japanese and South Koreans to set such issues aside, while associating historical concerns in China, and Russia too, with ideological holdovers that are overcome as countries become more realist in orientation. Unaware of how much the United States is implicated in the historical controversies of this region, Americans are ill prepared to take positive steps to managing these issues. This is not just a problem of unilateralist insensitivity to the perceptions of other states. Even multilateral leadership faces the challenge of widening the scope of mutual understanding to include historical sensitivities long

ignored. This is important for bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea, for trilateral coordination in which the United States works closely with both of these allies, and for solidarity in the face of the revival of sinocentrism, one manifestation of which can be seen in the Koguryo historical issue between China and South Korea.

Since 1945, U.S. leadership in Northeast Asia has rested on shared values as well as military power. On the one hand, these were values of allied resistance to the spread of communism by force from the Soviet Union, "Red China," or North Korea. An image of the "free world" loomed large in forging Japanese and South Korean dependency on the United States. With time, this image lost its appeal, as images of "anti-Soviet," "reform," and "friendship" China gained popularity in Japan and later South Korea; then the Soviet Union faded as a concern as the cold war ended and that country collapsed; and finally an isolated North Korea beset with severe problems made an invasion inconceivable, even if new dangers arose from its nuclear weapons and missiles. On the other hand, leadership of the two alliances also became rooted in a shared view of history as a struggle for self-determination and democracy. This meant rejection of colonialism and dictatorship. If some revisionists in Japan were equivocal about condemning past control of Korea and China at the same time as military rulers in South Korea kept insisting that democracy had to be postponed to achieve rapid development, it was widely assumed that these were temporary differences that would fade with time. After all, the value consensus during the cold war was deemed so solid that a shared sense of history could only steadily deepen. The post–cold war era has revealed, however, that, even between allies, differences over history in this region have explosive potential, while China's evolving views of history pose new, unanticipated challenges to its neighbors as well as to the United States.

Apart from taking pride in their Constitution, Americans do not look very far back when incorporating values into their national identity. The two defining twentieth-century events that retain their impact are the prolonged struggles against Hitler's *genocidal* Nazi aggression and Stalin's *great terror* communist machine bent on world revolution. Yet, two different struggles for a time eclipsed all others and still remain part of the lexicon of evil: Japan's militarist aggression, despite the fact that Emperor Hirohito (under whom Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and committed war crimes) emerged as a partner in the postwar occupation; and Mao Zedong's support for North Korean aggression and fanatical class struggle, despite his reemergence as the U.S. partner in normalizing

relations. These two examples reveal that history in East Asia is more complex. If it is not easy to continue to vilify those who have become your partners, the U.S. view of history still takes note of current attitudes toward the two defining struggles of "allies versus axis" and "free world versus totalitarianism." Were Japan (or Germany) to revive the offending symbols by defending its past behavior, Americans might be aroused from their usual historical amnesia. To a lesser extent, revived Chinese pride in the history of socialism may appear provocative.

The Role of History in East Asian Bilateral Relations

East Asian national identities rely heavily on interpretations of history. In 2003, Roh was elected president, bringing to power a South Korean progressive steeped in a milieu of criticism of the United States for its historical behavior. In 2004, the "battle over Koguryo" erupted between China and South Korea, disputing how to depict the history of an ancient kingdom. In 2005, ties between Japan and South Korea suffered a sharp setback over history linked to the Dokdo/Takeshima territorial dispute. In 2007, Abe Shinzo was chosen as the prime minister of Japan, representing revisionists whose views of history directly clash not only with those of South Korea and China but also with those of the United States. There is ample evidence of new historical challenges also if one looks closely at the messages of the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics of 2008 and at the speeches at the sixtieth anniversary celebration of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 2009 amid history projects stressing a sinocentric approach toward nations inside China's current borders and in neighboring states. In the background, North Korea kept asserting its angry historical grievances and Russia was reverting to aspects of the Soviet worldview favorable to much of Stalin's legacy. None of the states in Northeast Asia has so far been inclined to downplay history in its identity.

By 2010, clashes over history had calmed down. Abe and his successors stepped back from visits to the Yasukuni Shrine in hopes of stabilizing relations and then the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defeated the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the Lower House elections of August 30, 2009, promising to defuse tensions over history. After Lee assumed the presidency of South Korea on February 25, 2008, he repudiated the historical views of his predecessor, stressing the need to improve ties to the United States and Japan. Obama's more measured approach to values than that of George W. Bush also exerted a calming influence

from 2009. When the leaders of China, Japan, and South Korea met in October, they expressed interest in cooperating in the creation of an East Asian community, while discussions were started about writing a trilateral history textbook with government cooperation as a means of narrowing differences and raising consciousness of shared history on which the nations agree. Yet, just as the downward spiral over history earlier in the decade exaggerated the danger of this focus undermining regional stability, improvements at the end of the decade do not signify a breakthrough. The lesson to be drawn is not that the more analysts ignore history, the less relevant it will seem, but that a deeper appreciation of the impact of history is required to increase trust.

If the salience of history in current bilateral relations waxes and wanes for East Asian states, its overall significance for national identity remains high. This is consistent with the Confucian tradition, which rests legitimacy heavily on interpreting history in the correct manner. It is evident in writings about history, which reveal an intensity seldom found elsewhere in states with sustained economic development. The role of history in bilateral relations with the United States may not always be at the center of public debate, given the U.S. role in regime success or national security in these states, but that does not mean that history does not have great sensitivity. History has sparked strong emotions in regard to ties within the region and could do so for ties with the United States. Topics such as the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the division of Korea into two opposing states are fraught with tremendous emotional potential for U.S. allies, and after 1949 Chinese history has repeatedly centered on rebuking U.S. imperialism/hegemonism.

The biggest test of Sino-Japanese mutual understanding over history came to a head when the joint committee issued the conclusion to its final report at the end of 2009. At China's request, contemporary history after 1945 was dropped. Many differences were exposed in covering the essence of the war and responsibility for it. Although the Japanese chair Kitaoka Shinichi reported some progress, this project had brought little reconciliation.[1] The history gap was a reflection of conflicting national identities: the 1930s and 1940s test pride in the struggle against imperialism and the rise of communism; the cold war tests similar issues in China and the meaning of Japan's abrupt shift; and even the post–cold war era poses a test centered on what future is sought for regionalism

[1] "Senso rikai ni konan aru: Nitchu rekishi kenkyui ga soron kohyo," *Yomiuri shimbun*, December 25, 2009.

and globalization. At the center in all of the tests is how to assess the role of the United States as a historical force. China's failure to address sinocentrism and obsession with U.S. hegemonism, Japan's failure to be forthright about its imperialism and confusion over Asianism, and South Korea's difficulty in finding consensus on its history of division and dependence leave a tangle of historical confusion that cannot be overcome or even mitigated without new leadership.

The Impact of Historical Issues on U.S. Regional Leadership

U.S. priorities in relations with China, Japan, and South Korea are numerous. Some may reason that, as during the cold war or even in the two decades of transition that followed, spending energy on history issues is a diversion that would heighten emotions and interfere with more urgent objectives. In particular, becoming sidetracked in resolving historical differences with U.S. allies has little appeal when bilateral and even trilateral coordination is increasingly needed to face the brinkmanship of North Korea, the rise of China, and the renewed assertiveness of Russia as well as challenges in other regions from South Asia's Afghan-Pakistan front to Southwest Asia's destabilizing Iraq-Iran region. There is great merit at a time when states are grappling with the world financial crisis and climate change in avoiding lesser issues with great divisive potential. Yet, the case for acknowledging that history matters and working with leaders inclined to narrow existing differences also has merit. This applies to Japan and South Korea as well as China. U.S. leadership in the region can suffer if unresolved differences in perceptions of historical events and the values that are readily associated with them linger in these two key allies.

In 1998, in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, whose election victory brought a transfer of power that confirmed the maturity of South Korea's democracy, strongly endorsed globalization guided by universal values. If it had seemed that the spread of U.S. values since the end of the cold war had stumbled only against the tenacity of "Asian values," now even those seemed to be succumbing to the triumphalism of "universal values." Yet, no sooner had Americans been reassured by Kim's dismissal of "Asian values" and endorsement of alliance ties based on a shared worldview then a wave of "anti-Americanism" swept South Korea, punctuated by the election of Roh as a president intent on distancing his country from the United States. Similarly, in 2006, in the face of growing concern about threats to the status quo from North Korea and China, Japanese Foreign Minister

Aso Taro advocated an "arc of freedom and prosperity" to complement Abe's strengthened alliance ties to Bush. Yet, behind the façade of Abe's embrace of the U.S. alliance in the manner of his predecessor Koizumi Junichiro was awareness that his obsession with historical revisionism had the potential not only of arousing tension with South Korea, as occurred in 2007 when the "comfort women" issue flared, but also of focusing on the United States. The problem was not limited to LDP conservatives. When the DPJ was voted into power in September 2009, it promised in pursuit of goals such as an East Asian community to distance Japan from the tight, unequal U.S. embrace. These striking reversals in bilateral relations make no sense from the perspective of realist threat assessments. If some lay the blame on specific triggers – progressive South Koreans objected to Bush's "axis of evil" speech and policy toward North Korea, while the DPJ was generally opposed to the Iraq War and resort to unilateralism – others recognize that these reversals are best understood within a long-term context focused on historical memory. U.S. leadership remains surprisingly dependent on matters of history in a region where China's record of sinocentrism, Japan's record of militarism, and the way the U.S. government handled the final stages of World War II and its aftermath, including in South Korea, continue to arouse controversy.

Northeast Asia has faced a series of challenges to U.S. leadership since the end of World War II: the spread of revolutions after the Chinese communist victory in 1949; the Korean War; the Soviet military buildup and increasingly assertive posture until the mid-1980s; two North Korean nuclear crises after the cold war; and the rise of China marked by growing insistence on its values. All of these confirmed for most Japanese and South Koreans the importance of a close alliance with the United States. Recognition of shared adherence to democratic principles and human rights also reinforced U.S. leadership in recent decades. Yet, neither dependency on U.S. protection against threats to freedom nor respect for U.S. universal values suffices to align attitudes toward a broad range of values. Clashing perspectives on history stand in the way, casting a shadow on bilateral relations.

The first challenge we address in this book, starting in the next section, is how to exercise U.S. leadership on values, in which historical memory plays a large role in the Northeast Asian context. This subject figures repeatedly in the following chapters and needs further clarification than the dichotomy between one side pressing for consistency with U.S. values by forcibly criticizing states that violate them and the other side urging pragmatism by avoiding acrimonious insertion of values and history into

diplomacy. The second challenge is raised in the chapters in Part I by Kazuhiko Togo and Gi-Wook Shin on how the Japanese, led by conservatives, and South Koreans, with progressives in the lead, have shown an interest in bringing historical issues to the fore in relations with the United States. In response, I discuss the implications of U.S. responses to each ally. The third challenge is raised in the chapters in Part II by Togo and Cheol Hee Park on the U.S. role in clashing historical memories between Japan and South Korea. Again, I respond with an assessment from the U.S. side on what may be feasible and effective. A final challenge raised in the exchange in Part III between Jin Linbo and Scott Snyder is the nature of the Koguyro history issue and the U.S. role in dealing with it. My response is to reflect more broadly on the significance of the dispute as a sign of intensifying sinocentric history.

Much has been written about the history disputes between Japan and its neighbors, but this book is distinctive in putting the U.S. role at the center of attention and linking the historical disputes in Northeast Asia to a sustained narrative about U.S. leadership. At times of intensifying emotionalism over history, the prime goal may be to calm matters and refocus concern on common interests. At other times, however, it may be possible for U.S. leadership to strive for more, framing historical memories in the broader context of values. When states focus their dissatisfaction on the negative memories they have about U.S. behavior, there may be no alternative but to take a more active role in dealing with history. The prevailing U.S. diplomatic strategy of avoidance is increasingly untenable.

Recent U.S. Leadership, Values, and History

Bush took office in 2001 guided by thinking that Bill Clinton had lacked a moral compass for U.S. foreign policy. He had been too compromising, too reluctant to use the unprecedented assets of American power on behalf of moral objectives. Many supported Bush on the basis of fundamentalist religious beliefs. Others started from a messianic outlook on U.S. leadership to transform the world. Their assessment reflected widespread malaise among conservatives that American society was becoming relativist, losing faith in clear principles in favor of some sort of eclecticism of various cultures, each with some claim to truth, having the right to coexist. It also signaled frustration with the limited levers then being employed to reshape a world at odds with their ideals.

At home, the Clinton approach had allegedly cast doubt on the melting pot of all peoples embracing a common American tradition. Abroad, it

accepted globalization on the basis of diverse values rather than undertaking an assertive civilizing mission on behalf of American values with universal validity. Specifically, Clinton was accused of erring in policies toward North Korea, China, Japan, and the region as a whole because he was not making correct value choices. In contrast, Bush began by forging an agenda for a values-based foreign policy in East Asia: placing North Korea in the "axis of evil," treating China as a "strategic competitor" rather than coddling it as a "strategic partner"; upgrading alliance ties with Japan on the basis of not only a shared "realist" worldview but also attention to the depth of shared values; and pressuring South Korea to embrace the same agenda within the U.S.-Japan alliance framework. Bush initiated a values-based regional strategy repudiating Clinton's supposedly reactive, compromising ways.

In time, Bush's regional strategy failed as he fell back on policies that resembled those of Clinton; yet values kept disrupting regional relations even after U.S. pragmatism was evident. In the fall of 2005, despite U.S. acceptance of the Joint Statement in the Six-Party Talks that approved the principles for pursuing a compromise approach with North Korea, a new U.S. push to put priority on human rights in North Korea damaged ties with the North and with South Korea, where Roh was trying to build on the Joint Statement even after Bush imposed financial sanctions on a bank in Macao for handling the North's ill-gotten funds and thus severed the North's ties to the international financial system. A year later, however, after the North's nuclear test, there was no stopping U.S. pragmatism in moving through bilateral talks to a plan with the North encapsulated in the Joint Agreement of February 2007 and the deal to complete phase 2 to secure disabling of the Yongbyon reactor and a declaration of nuclear assets, even if belatedly in 2008.

Values rose to the forefront again in the spring of 2008 when China repressed Tibetan demonstrations and reacted to violent actions with demonization of the Dalai Lama and his supposed threat to state sovereignty. While many in the West agreed with the Dalai Lama that China was guilty of "cultural genocide" and crushing any freedom of religion, Chinese citizens apparently accepted the rationale of their government that core values of the state were endangered. Eager to sustain progress in working with China on many global issues including the Six-Party Talks, Bush downplayed the values at stake or any need for a sharp response such as not attending the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. Russia's punishing military offensive in Georgia during the Olympic Games put values on trial again, amid uncertainty over