

# The Hokkaido Summit as a Springboard for Grassroots Initiatives: The "Peace, Reconciliation & Civil Society" Symposium

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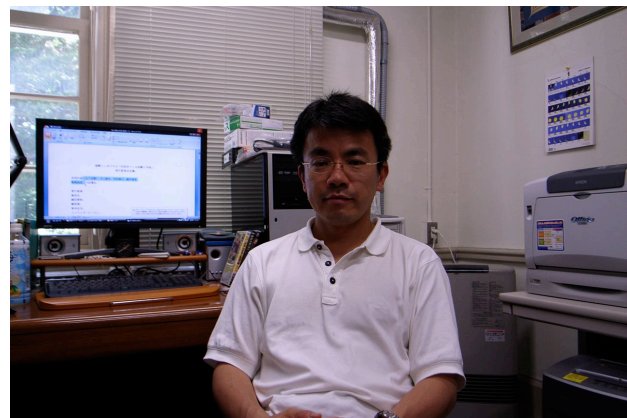
## The Hokkaido Summit as a Springboard for Grassroots Initiatives: The "Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society" Symposium

Lukasz Zablonksi and Philip Seaton

*In recent years, the G8 Summit has gone beyond being simply a gathering of world political leaders. The Summit is an occasion for a wide variety of NGOs, activists and civic groups from across the globe to congregate and discuss a multitude of issues. When the location of the 2008 G8 Summit was announced, it was clear that the environment would be a key theme under discussion. As the Hokkaido Toyako Summit (7-9 July 2008) drew closer, rising fuel and food prices and their devastating effects, particularly on the world's poorest people, became an important part of the agenda, too.*

*But this did not stop numerous other civic groups from organizing events with themes not on the agenda of the main G8 Summit. This paper discusses one such event, the international symposium "Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society", which addressed a perennial topic in East Asia: the legacies of Japanese imperialism and war in the twentieth century. The fact that the symposium was held illustrates the tremendous power of a large international event such as the G8 Summit to galvanize and energize civil society into action.*

**Reconciliation and Civil Society: Toward a Sustainable Peace in East Asia and Europe** was the brainchild of Oda Hiroshi, an associate professor at Hokkaido University. In July 2007, he suggested organizing a conference about the role of civil society groups in promoting peace and reconciliation in East Asia to Tonohira Yoshihiko, a founding member of the Hokkaido Forum for the Recognition of Forced Labour and its Victims (hereafter "Hokkaido Forum") and head of the East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace [1]. The idea generated interest among activists, but also concerns that the financial and logistical challenges of such an ambitious project could overstretch the resources of the groups involved. [2] Eventually, a network of civil society groups that planned to use the Toyako meeting as a springboard for voicing their local and global concerns and policy proposals was established. On 9 July 2008, a full-day international symposium was held in Sapporo.



The international symposium "Peace,

Oda Hiroshi

The central question of the symposium, and its *leitmotiv*, was: What can citizens do to create peaceful future relations among the peoples of the world, while also recognizing historical responsibility? It was addressed in more specific terms in four distinct, but connected, thematic sessions ([full program in Japanese here](#)): 1) Working for reconciliation in Hokkaido; 2) Reconciliation in East Asia and trans-national cooperation within civil society; 3) Learning from the German organization Action Reconciliation Service for Peace; and theoretical approaches toward 4) Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society.

In addition to the symposium, several pre-events (held between 26 May and 8 July) and one post-event (10-11 July) were organized. The pre-events had the additional purpose of providing publicity for the main symposium. The themes of the pre-events were: 1) a presentation on the “comfort women” issue in contemporary Japan hosted by the Women’s Active Museum (WAM) [3]; 2) personal testimony about war actions by Kanazawa Masao, an Imperial Army veteran and former member of the Chinese Returnees’ Association [4]; 3) the Etekekampa Association and reconciliation between Ainu and Japanese, 4) the film *Urihakyo* about the Korean School (Chosen Gakko) in Hokkaido; 5) a film screening and discussion about forced labour in Hokkaido hosted by the Hokkaido Forum; and 6) a seminar about the activities of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, a civic organization. The post-event was The East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace held in Shumarinai. These events were attended by around 300 people, in addition to the approximately 300 people who attended the main symposium.



**War Veteran Kanazawa speaks of his war experiences at one of the pre-events**

The symposium also aimed to bring together civic groups and the academy to seek answers and solutions to the problematic legacies of the past that affect the construction of better relationships in the present and future. The academic – activist blend on the organizing committee and among the speakers at the symposium was crucial for mobilizing sufficient personnel (volunteers) and financial resources to organize the event, which was one of the civic summits within the framework of the [2008 People’s Summit in Hokkaido](#) (Alternative Summit) and was simultaneously part of Hokkaido University’s [Sustainability Weeks 2008](#).

### **“Reconciliation”: Meanings and Interpretations**

The original title of the symposium did not include the word “reconciliation” and primarily addressed the role that citizens’ groups play in the promotion of peace (*shimin ga tsukuru heiwa*; literally, “peace produced by citizens”). However, the word *wakai* (“reconciliation”) was added in one of the early meetings of the organizing committee following a suggestion by Kobayashi Hisatomo, a civic activist from the Hokkaido Forum and the Japanese – German Peace Forum, Hokkaido.

The term became the most complex and problematic concept discussed during the symposium. In an interview Kobayashi explained what “*wakai*” meant for him:

“*Wakai* is a very difficult word to translate and explain in Japanese. In the past two or three years, a few books concerning the problem of reconciliation have been published in Japan. They make it in to two problems. First, they point out that the creation of a mutual view of history is needed between both perpetrators and victims. That is to say, we have to clear up the misunderstandings about the past and get to know each other. Secondly, when it comes to reconciliation, we have to determine the conditions for reconciliation. In other words, reconciliation is a process of clearing hurdles.

However, these discussions take place primarily in books in Japan. In this sense, this symposium is a very innovative and valuable event. From my own point of view, reconciliation means the reconstruction of relationships between people. I believe that civil society has the power to initiate such discussion and appeal effectively to the national government to issue an apology.” [5]

The word “*wakai*” in Japanese is considered somewhat ambiguous. The Chinese character “*wa*” stands for harmony or co-existence, but it is also employed to refer to “Japan” (as in *wajin*, Japanese people, or *washoku*, Japanese food). Moreover, the character was used frequently in the rhetoric of Japanese imperialist ideology and therefore contains connotations contradictory to the spirit of reconciliation promoted by the symposium. “*kai*”, by contrast, means to dissolve or clarify. Therefore *wakai* could be translated into English as a harmonious action

of clarification or settlement.

Tonohira Yoshihiko discussed the problems surrounding the term *wakai* during his introductory remarks to the symposium:

“Those involved in organizing this symposium started using this word nervously and not without some hesitation. The word *wakai* has meanings that are much more ambiguous than ‘responsibility’, ‘apology’, ‘compensation’ and ‘rights’. Historically, for many of the side of the perpetrators – namely the Japanese – this word was often connected with the avoidance of responsibility for past crimes, in other words, to forgetting. From the point of view of history’s victims, such as the Ainu people, the sudden popularity and careless use of this word has not been viewed without alarm.” [6]

During the preparatory stage of the symposium, all these aspects of the understanding and usage of *wakai* were extensively debated. The discussion became quite significant while deciding on the logo of the symposium. The initial logo was composed of the character “*wa*” and an owl, which in Ainu culture is the guardian deity of a village. Concerns were raised about the connotations of the character “*wa*” and its use within the rhetoric of Japanese imperialism. However, since the character is part of both the words ‘reconciliation’ and ‘peace’ (*heiwa*), it was already very ‘visible’ in the symposium’s title. A compromise was reached by using an old-style Chinese form that minimized the association with Japanese imperialism.



**The Symposium  
Logo**

These debates over the meanings of “*wakai*” are not limited to Japanese. The literature discussing “reconciliation” in English exhibits a number of different approaches depending on the nature of the conflict for which reconciliation is required. [7] By introducing German perspectives, and the term *Versöhnung* (with all the nuances that term implies following German aggression in World War II), there was much scope for talking at cross-purposes during the symposium. The symposium narrowed the focus by using the term “historical reconciliation,” that is, the attempt to restore or improve relations among groups (nations, or ethnic, religious and social groups) who experienced conflict and historical violence, in particular colonial rule or war. Reconciliation is a linear process, which integrates the past, the present and the future of parties that seek the recovery of relations among themselves. It can be realized only in relation to others, and does not imply a unilateral peace but a relational peace.

Crucial for historical reconciliation are the

concepts of victim and perpetrator. Typically we would expect that a prerequisite for reconciliation is that the perpetrators (aggressors) make sincere efforts to understand the grievances of the victims, acknowledge their roles as perpetrators, and initiate a process of healing the wounds of the past. “Addressing the past” with a view to reconciliation and sustainable peace has typically centred on three issues: apologies to the victims, financial or other compensation, and justice in the form of punishment of those guilty of aggression. Other measures may be required, too, such as the erection of a permanent memorial or museum and the inclusion of the past wrongs in history education, which are key demands of former “comfort women” alongside their demands for a sincere apology and official compensation from the Japanese government. [8]

The reconciliation process, however, is not completed simply by clearing all these hurdles. The reconciliation process can easily be derailed or reversed by subsequent events. Ongoing reconciliation requires measures to ensure that a version of history acceptable to the victims is passed down to subsequent generations in the aggressor nation via the education system, the media, museums and the arts. And politicians representing the aggressor group can negate apologies or damage the perceived sincerity of apologies by any actions deemed to be defending or justifying past actions. These factors explain why allowing nationalistic content in Japanese school history textbooks and commemoration of Japan’s military war dead at Yasukuni Shrine (which is often perceived as exoneration of the war criminals enshrined there) continue to be such important diplomatic and political issues in East Asia.

However, historical reconciliation is never as simple as the theoretical linear process connecting past, present and future outlined above. The reasons for this are clear in the Japanese case. Japan’s wars and imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century involved



multiple conflicts of differing natures with multiple enemies. Japanese war memories remain highly contested and no broad consensus has been achieved within historical consciousness of those wars. Within Japanese society there are multiple cultural narratives that variously stress Japan's role as victim (such as in the bombing of Japanese cities, semi-forced migration to Manchuria, or conscript soldiers sent to their deaths) and perpetrator, or even the minority nationalist view that Japan was the heroic liberator of Asia from Western colonialism. [9]

This diversity in war experience and pluralism in Japanese historical consciousness (in both official circles and society in general) create an environment that makes reconciliation initiatives extremely difficult on a national level. [10] Using the simple linear model, one may argue that because Japan killed thousands of civilians during the Nanking Massacre (1937), for example (although one could cite any number of atrocities from the "kill all, burn all, loot all" policy to the sexual enslavement of "comfort women"), the onus is on Japan to admit guilt and initiate reconciliation, starting with an unequivocal apology. In any case, ideological contestation within Japan creates vocal opposition from the political right to such initiatives. Moreover, such initiatives cannot be decontextualized from the wider war. Japan was not alone in committing atrocities, so if the slaughter of civilians in Nanking requires an apology and reconciliation initiatives from Japan, then most Japanese would argue that the killing of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (and many other cities in conventional bombing) is deserving of a similar apology and reconciliation process initiated by the USA. The two linear processes become entangled, along with the many other examples of aggression and victimhood created during the years of conflict. Rather than a neat, bilateral, perpetrator - victim relationship, the reconciliation process develops into a multilateral competition (in other words,

another conflict situation) to assert claims for relative victimhood, and thereby the "right" to expect reconciliation initiatives from others rather than initiating them oneself.

According to symposium organizer Oda Hiroshi, in the academic and political discourse about historical reconciliation, the theme of "post-war reconciliation" has become predominant, and the importance of "post-colonial reconciliation" has been marginalized. [11] Both types of historical reconciliation are a matter of public concern in Japan. Japan bears responsibility for the wars in East Asia because it waged aggressive warfare against several Asian countries and inflicted suffering on the civilian populations of those countries. But the issue of post-colonial reconciliation, and more specifically those people colonized by Japan who still live within the boundaries of the contemporary Japanese state, have received less attention. In Hokkaido, however, issues of post-colonial responsibility are of particular local importance given the colonization of Ainu lands. Ainu - Japanese reconciliation was the first topic discussed at the Symposium.

## Conference Themes

### *Ainu - Japanese reconciliation*

Post-colonial reconciliation in Japan has special relevance in Ainu Mosir, the name given by the indigenous Ainu people to the island now known as Hokkaido. *Ainu* means "human being" or "people", *mo* means "peaceful" or "calm", and *sir* means "the earth" or "land". There has been regular contact between the Hokkaido Ainu and Wajin (Japanese in Ainu designation) since the fifteenth century and earlier, and from 1593 a permanent Wajin presence was established in Hokkaido through the Matsumae fiefdom at the southern end of the island. During the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Wajin influence expanded to trading posts around Hokkaido's coastline and the requisition of Ainu labour became increasingly exploitative.

Following the Meiji restoration (1868), the full-scale colonization of Hokkaido became national policy. [12]

As the symposium's first speaker, Ogawa Sanae from the Etekekampa Association ("etekekampa" means "let's join our hands" in the Ainu language) spoke about the educational difficulties faced by Ainu children. The association engages in fundraising to provide scholarships to children from families on Public Assistance for the Poor (*seikatsu hogo*). The Etekekampa Association was created about 20 years ago and receives support from many Japanese, both in the form of volunteerism and donations. The group has mainly helped Ainu children gain access to high school education that otherwise would have been denied to them, but it also has ambitions to expand university advancement rates for Ainu young people.

During post-event activities on the two days following the main symposium, Ainu activist and historian Ogawa Ryukichi conducted a fieldwork session through the East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace. The purpose was to discover little-known but important sites in Ainu history. The tour started with the charnel house (*nokotsudo*) of Ainu people at the Hokkaido University campus. This site is a reminder of the ignominious role of Hokkaido University professors and other Wajin anthropologists in grave-robbing and the use of Ainu remains for social Darwinist studies of the Ainu aimed at "proving" their racial inferiority, and thereby justifying the colonization of Ainu lands and discriminatory treatment of Ainu people. [13] The tour then proceeded to a monument near Ebetsu and a cemetery in Ebetsu. The latter two sites commemorate the forced removal and relocation of Karafuto Ainu from Sakhalin Island to Hokkaido in 1875. The monument near Ebetsu, however commemorates Hokkaido "reclamation" (*kaitaku*) from a Japanese perspective and makes no mention of Ainu settlement in the area.



**The fieldwork session of Ogawa Ryukichi**

Given the Japanese Parliament's adoption of a resolution that, for the first time, recognises the Ainu as an "indigenous people with a distinct language, religion and culture," [14] the processes of reconciliation within Japan and Hokkaido in particular assumes new importance. These issues relating to the position of the Ainu within contemporary Japanese society and the implications of the Japanese government's recognition of the Ainu as an indigenous people are examined in more detail in ann-elise lewallen's article, "[Indigenous at Last!](#)". However, in the absence of an apology to Ainu people, official or unofficial, the Diet resolution falls short of what many Ainu had expected, so the process of reconciliation as defined above remains a distant goal.

### *Reconciliation in East Asia*

A mutual understanding of history between perpetrators and victims is an essential aspect of a reconciliation process. It was essential, therefore, to include specific accounts of Japanese aggression in the symposium and to listen to the grievances of victims.

There were two talks documenting Japanese aggression. Former Japanese Imperial Army soldier Ohkawara Kohichi testified to his war actions and his personal role in the killing of

unarmed civilians in China. Ohkawara was a member of the Chinese Returnees Association (Chugoku Kikansha Renrakukai, hereafter Chukiren). Around 1000 Japanese soldiers, who had been interned in Soviet labor camps after the war, were transferred to the Fushun War Criminals Detention Facility in Northeast China in 1950. There they experienced unexpectedly humane treatment from the Chinese, and over time the prisoners came to acknowledge their crimes. After their return to Japan in 1956 they formed Chukiren and were active in testifying about their war crimes as a way of atoning for the past and promoting reconciliation with China. With the aging of their members, Chukiren disbanded in 2002, but the torch was taken up by a new generation of activists determined to preserve the “Miracle of Fushun” (the process of acknowledgement the soldiers went through thanks to their humane treatment, and the power of acknowledgement to promote reconciliation). The Continuing the Miracle of Fushun Society (Hokkaido Branch) was heavily involved in the organization of the symposium and organized one of the pre-events: testimony by another Chukiren member, Kanazawa Masao, who had taken part in the infamous “three alls” (“kill all, burn all, loot all”) policy in China. [15]

In addition to this testimony by former soldiers, Tonohira Yoshihiko discussed the work of the Hokkaido Forum in the return of the remains of forced laborers to their relatives in Korea, as will be discussed later.

The voices of victims featured in the second session of the symposium. One Chinese and one Korean lawyer active in the movement to gain official compensation and an apology from the Japanese government and corporations that used slave labor outlined their legal battles and grievances.

Kang Jian from the Beijing Fang Yuan law firm contrasted the attitude that the Japanese government adopts in seeking better state

relations with China with the endeavours of Japanese civic organisations and groups that have helped Chinese victims to bring individual compensation claims to the Japanese courts. However, in her view, the lack of resolution on the part of Japanese judges to decide against the Japanese government and companies (for example, in lawsuits against Japanese companies that employed forced labour) is one of the biggest obstacles to reconciliation. She was critical of the common practice in such suits to accept the defendants’ claims that the statute of limitations has expired, and to rule that the defendants are immune from legal responsibility toward victims. [16]



In the same session, Korean activist and advocate Park Won-Soon talked about the “comfort women” issue and other historical problems existing in Korean-Japanese bilateral relations. In a similar manner to Kang Jian, he emphasized the discrepancy between conscientious Japanese citizens’ groups active on war responsibility issues and the Japanese authorities in the ways they approach the past. Regarding Japan’s attempts to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, Park said it was “nonsense” to think of Japan as a suitable permanent member of UNSC in the absence of a satisfactory solution to the “comfort women” issue, which should be regarded as a crime against humanity. The government’s attempt to settle this issue via



the [Asian Women's Fund](#) (a private fund supported and largely paid for by the government) was not deemed sufficient.

Both speakers took a conciliatory stance in their comments about Japanese citizens groups sympathetic to their positions. But ultimately, both speakers demonstrated the limitations of Japanese civil society in promoting reconciliation in the absence of clear government policies to assume responsibility for Japanese war actions. In one sense, “listening to these views of victims” is an essential component of reconciliation and these sentiments regarding the necessity of *official* apologies and compensation needed to be raised. However, the comments could also be interpreted as a message to Japanese civil society that well-meaning attempts at grassroots reconciliation without concurrent political pressure on the Japanese government to change its position on war responsibility issues would ultimately not lead to a comprehensive reconciliation process.

Kang and Park missed a critical point, however, by framing the issues bilaterally and neglecting the broader international context of the reconciliation issue. For example, one is tempted to remark caustically that the human rights abuses committed in the “comfort station” system would sit very comfortably alongside the human rights abuses of the current UNSC permanent members. The United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France all have major stains on their records, not only as major arms exporters and backers of hideous regimes, but in their own conflicts/repression as colonial or occupying powers or invaders, including Vietnam, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, Afghanistan, Tibet, Malaysia and Algeria. The UNSC members (despite the often lofty rhetoric) actually have a vested interest in *not* encouraging a global legal framework for holding states to account and prosecuting those responsible for state-orchestrated human rights

abuses. There is a clear double standard: the perpetrators of war crimes in “small” nations who are not key allies, such as Serbia and Rwanda, are tried at the International Criminal Court or other tribunals; meanwhile the world’s most powerful shield such allies as Saudi Arabia and Israel (in the case of the United States) and their own military personnel accused of war crimes from judgment in The Hague or any other form of international justice system. This helps illustrate why there is little international pressure on Japan, especially against the political backdrop of the “war on terror,” coming from other governments for the payment of additional compensation and the pursuit of war criminals. A comprehensive process of addressing war responsibility by Japan would set too many “dangerous precedents” for nations with a penchant for using their militaries overseas. [17]

As for Japanese apologies, Tessa Morris-Suzuki noted with exasperation in her lecture at the end of the symposium (discussed below) an example of significant support for Japan regarding its “apologies” from its key ally: the USA. In 2007, former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo provoked international controversy by making remarks deeply offensive to the “comfort women” community. [18] The comments coincided with a trip to the USA and Abe hastily apologized to U.S. President George W. Bush. In an extraordinary gesture of support for the under-pressure Japanese leader that was grossly offensive to the “comfort women”, despite the fact that no “comfort women” were present during this meeting, Bush bizarrely said that *he* accepted Abe’s awkward and ineffective apology!

When the full international context is considered, and when one considers the importance of the Japanese government’s stance for broader reconciliation processes in East Asia, such instances of staunch support for the Japanese government from its American ally



constitute a critical factor in understanding Japan's unsuccessful attempts to date of advancing (or, more cynically, its successful attempts at avoiding) the reconciliation process at an official level.

### *Germany and Japan*

Christian Staffa's talk about the work of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace and the introduction of a Germany-Japan comparison also highlighted the significant challenges still facing Japan. The group [Action Reconciliation Service for Peace](#) (ARSP) has learned during its 50 years of service in many European countries invaded and occupied by Germany during World War II that reconciliation is a long-term project, and a process in which progress comes through concrete initiatives rather than big words. In spite of fairly unfavourable conditions for the work of reconciliation in post-war Europe, caused primarily by hostility toward Germans and the complexity of the political situation in Germany and the continent as a whole, ARSP persisted in its work in victim countries. When the very first group of ARSP volunteers visited a village in Norway, they were greeted with a volley of stones thrown over their bus. However, nowadays ARSP sends approximately 180 long-term (for 12 to 24 months) volunteers every year to countries such as Israel, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, and the USA for social service and education projects. It also organizes numerous workshops for peace and reconciliation.



The German government is widely argued to have adopted the sort of apologetic official stance that the Japanese government should be adopting. The role of the USA and European nations in pressuring Germany into reparations in contrast to the protection Japan has received during the Cold War and beyond is vital for understanding the discrepancy. Furthermore, the hostility faced by many ARSP volunteers [19] is an indication that the official German stance, while largely acceptable to many victims (with important exceptions, such as the slave laborers who felt that they had not been adequately compensated, in response to which the German government set up the Remembrance, Responsibility and Future Fund in 2000), is not sufficient on its own to assuage all bitterness. This is where the role of civil society becomes most important in pushing the reconciliation process further, even if this means enduring considerable hostility.

By contrast, the rhetoric used by Kang and Park indicates that, in the absence of an acceptable official apology, reconciliation attempts led by civil society take on special importance because they can be held up as examples of what the government must do. It is a conspicuous aspect of Japan-China relations, for example, that soldiers guilty of serious atrocities in China (such as Chukiren members and other repentant former soldiers like Azuma Shiro [20]) have been welcomed back as friends

if they have confessed and sincerely apologized for their crimes, while, or perhaps because, Japanese politicians continue to stir anger through actions such as worship at Yasukuni Shrine.

There is no shortage of citizens' groups in Japan active on war and peace issues. However, this should not be confused with a large movement promoting reconciliation. In general, as Mari Yamamoto points out, grassroots peace activism in post-war Japan did not draw its inspiration from the knowledge of atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers. Many groups have based their activities on aspects of Japanese suffering, and many movements took shape in tandem with other activities to promote democratization, economic growth and humanitarianism. [21]

In this context, it is important to differentiate mainstream "peace" movements with "reconciliation" organizations. Examples of the former have typically emphasized *Japanese suffering* as the reason why war should not be repeated, as in Japan's large anti-nuclear movement, while the latter (including Chukiren and the Hokkaido Forum) have stressed the need to confront and assume responsibility for *Japanese aggression*. However, there are forms of accepting responsibility that only governments (or corporations in the slave labour issue) can undertake, such as official apologies and compensation to the victims and their families, and in the case of governments, state-level reparations. All these steps are necessary for Reconciliation "with a capital R". By contrast, reconciliation "with a small r", meaning at a civil society level, has basically two important roles in Japan which can supplement Reconciliation. Kobayashi Hisatomo described them as follows:

"There are two fundamental tasks for civil society organizations. First, they should study history and through these

studies try to learn what really happened. Armed with this knowledge about the past, they should try to contact the victims or their families and, if possible, establish good relationships with them, on the basis of historical truth. Second, civic groups should put pressure on the Japanese government, or in general on the nation's political elite, to issue an acceptable apology and pay compensation to the victims."

Christian Staffa, by contrast, stressed that being proactive in addressing the past and approaching the victim country should be the major strategy for civic groups to further reconciliation. "If civic initiatives are taken seriously in the victim countries, something really important can happen in terms of the improvement of the relationships between perpetrators and victims." [22] However, these differing perspectives must be seen in the light of the differing levels of responsibility assumed by the German and Japanese states, with the reconciliation process at an official level clearly far more advanced in Germany. The Germany-Japan comparison clarifies how an effective international reconciliation process requires both official and unofficial initiatives working in tandem. Even then, there will be many obstacles and difficulties, but the futility of attempting a reconciliation process without the participation of civil society is clear.

### *Post-colonial reconciliation*

The final session of the symposium brought the discussion back to where the symposium had begun: reconciliation between colonizers and indigenous peoples. Tessa Morris-Suzuki talked about the apology issued by the Australian government to the Aborigines, and in particular Aborigine children forcibly removed from their families and brought up by foster families.

According to Morris-Suzuki, in the long and arduous process of reconciliation there are two factors that determine the extent and success

of the process. First and foremost, there must be a pursuit of the historical facts about the atrocities committed. This requires dialogue between perpetrators and victims to achieve a common view of the past.

The second factor is a genuine and effective apology. A genuine and effective apology not only acknowledges how wrong the past actions were, but also recognizes the inadequacy of previous attempts to acknowledge and atone for the past. In this regard, the apology made by the Australian government to the Aborigines for the so-called “stolen generation” was a good example of an effective apology: the apology was given in the Parliament building directly to the representatives of various Aborigine groups, who were invited as honoured guests. The apology indicated that the grievances of the victims had been heard and acknowledged: the known abuses and past wrongs were listed, thereby becoming a permanent record for the education of younger generations about the past. This effective apology was in marked contrast to the example of Prime Minister Abe’s awkward and ineffective “apology” to the “comfort women” cited above.

But, as Morris-Suzuki cautioned, the apology was not the end but merely the beginning of the reconciliation process. The effectiveness of the apology depends on whether other policies and actions contribute to the long-term reduction in animosity between the reconciling parties. Only then can genuine reconciliation be said to have been achieved. In particular, the process requires the empowerment of the victim group so that reconciliation is a restoration of a relationship between equals (or in some cases the establishment of such a relationship for the first time), and not the gift of the powerful to the weak.

Morris-Suzuki’s talk had deep implications for the reconciliation process in Hokkaido between Ainu and Wajin. It illustrated the extremely long journey that Japan still has to travel for

domestic, let alone international, reconciliation. And in the particular case of Hokkaido where the symposium was held, whereas the Ainu have at long last been officially recognized as the indigenous people of Hokkaido, an official apology including appropriate compensation for victims is nowhere in sight.



**The symposium,  
panel discussion**

## Putting Reconciliation into Action in Hokkaido

The symposium clarified the importance of civil society’s role working together with the government to create a comprehensive reconciliation process. Hokkaido has a number of local groups active in reconciliation initiatives. One reason is that the high numbers of slave labourers who toiled in Hokkaido’s mines or on construction projects during the war and the colonization of Ainu lands have created significant local historical responsibility issues to address alongside the more general national issues of responsibility for aggressive war waged in Asia. This gives Hokkaido much in common with Kyushu, another region that was a centre of the Japanese coalmining industry and is today a centre of forced labor reparations work. Comparing Hokkaido and Kyushu, William Underwood notes, “Hokkaido has become a hotbed of similarly energetic redress activities, with a group called the



Hokkaido Forum forming from other groups in 2003 and successfully building coalitions among citizen networks.” [23] This final section looks at the main activities of the Hokkaido Forum and East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace, as examples of how citizens groups can take the lead in reconciliation activities and thereby draw the government into participation in a more comprehensive national effort towards achieving reconciliation.

The Hokkaido Forum’s main activities are finding, excavating and returning the remains of Chinese and Korean forced labour victims to their families. The group also promotes reconciliation between Ainu and Japanese. The East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace has similar aims as the Hokkaido Forum, but its activities mainly involve bringing students from Japan, South Korea and other countries together to discuss and study each other’s views on the past. Usually, there are two workshops a year, in the summer and winter.

One person who is deeply involved with both the Hokkaido Forum and the East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace is Tonohira Yoshihiko, a Buddhist priest from Fukagawa in Hokkaido. In the 1970s he joined a group of Hokkaido historians led by Koike Yoshitaka that collected testimonies of local people in Hokkaido, especially with regard to forced labour in coal mines and road or dam construction. The first excavations of remains conducted by the group took place in the 1980s. [24]



**Tonohira Yoshihiko**

The Hokkaido Forum was founded in 2003. In December 2002, the Hongwan-ji Sapporo Branch Temple (Sapporo Betsuin) announced that it was in possession of the ashes of Koreans and Chinese who had been slave labourers in the area during the Pacific War. The ashes of 101 victims came into the temple’s possession from various corporations that employed forced labourers in Hokkaido, Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. They remained in the temple’s charnel house for almost sixty years. The temple expressed its wishes to return the ashes to the families. Following this development, in February 2003 the Hokkaido Forum was established by various civic groups that were previously concerned with the discovery and return of remains.

Through their work, the Hokkaido Forum discovered ashes left in various places around Hokkaido. Numerous boxes of ashes were found



at Buddhist temples in other cities around Hokkaido, such as Akabira, Muroran, Nemuro, Bibai, and Kayanuma. Through connections with civic organisations and government institutions in Korea, the Forum identified some of the victims' families. For example, a group of seven members of bereaved families paid a visit to Muroran in May 2005 to pay their respects, and the ashes of the victims were transferred to wooden boxes.

However, the families refused to take the ashes home with them, arguing that the return of the ashes was the responsibility of the Japanese government and the Japanese corporations that jointly carried out the forced labour enterprise. Additionally, the families reiterated their call for the government and companies to issue an official apology and compensation. From the point of view of the families, as well as many others in Korea, China, Japan and elsewhere, the Japanese government and corporations had not sufficiently addressed their moral and legal responsibilities to the people of Asia after the war.



The first meeting of the East Asia Joint Workshop for Peace was held in the summer of

1997 in Shumarinai, Horokanai-cho. During this pioneering event the ashes of forced labourers from Shumarinai Dam were excavated. Another important excavation coordinated by workshop participants took place in Asajino, Sarufutsu Village, in August 2006. William Underwood describes this one-week-event as the “climax” to an unprecedented, summer-long program featuring Korean forced labour reparations activities in multiple locations across Japan:

“Two-hundred fifty 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. Remains were recovered of at least ten suspected forced labourers who had apparently been cremated on the spot, according to South Korean forensic specialist.” [25]

The activities of the Hokkaido Forum and the Workshop have become to some extent embedded in the bilateral governmental framework for returning the remaining ashes of forced labour victims to Korea. Indeed, the grassroots groundwork (in the literal sense of the word) clarified the need for specific government action and created a certain momentum for it. Following Korean demands from Roh Moo-Hyun to Koizumi Junichiro that the ashes of conscripted Korean soldiers and civilian victims of forced labour be returned to Korea, the Japanese government in January 2008 returned the ashes of 101 soldiers which had been stored in Yutenji Temple in Tokyo. But over 1,000 (mostly military) remains are still held at Yutenji.

In response to the wishes of the victims' families in Korea, the Hokkaido Forum organized a return of ashes in February 2008. The ashes of three victims from Muroran and another from Akabira were taken to the Korean families.

Generous public donations supported a visit to South Korea by a group of thirty Japanese activists, who throughout their journey respectfully held the ashes in their arms. In Korea, the Forum was supported by the Sokei-sect of the Houonji Buddhist temple, where a memorial service was held. The Japanese vice-minister of foreign affairs and mayors of local governments also sent messages. But “The government rejected the group’s request for an official representative to attend the Muroran memorial service and for travel expenses, funeral expenses and condolence money to be paid to visiting relatives – as in the case of the Yutenji Temple remains in January.” This “double standard” in the treatment of military and civilian victims is characteristic of the Japanese government’s treatment of the remains issue, and does not satisfy either the Hokkaido Forum or Korean bereaved relatives. [26]

There is also the issue of corporate responsibility. The seven bereaved family members who had refused to take the remains back following their trip to Muroran in 2005 later changed their position. They agreed to the unofficial return of the remains by the Hokkaido Forum fearing that they would never get the remains back if they waited for a change in Japanese government policy or for the company to take the initiative. These three sets of remains were returned in February 2008. The company where the labourers worked (now called Shin-Nittetsu, based in Muroran) denied that it had any legal responsibility for the return of the bones because it became a new company after the war and therefore has no legal responsibility for the return of the remains. [27] However, Shin-Nittetsu did send a wreath, a letter of condolence and a condolence gift of money (10,000 yen) to the families. This limited response is a more significant acknowledgement of corporate responsibility than many, and some corporations such as Mitsubishi, which had thousands of forced laborers, vigorously deny responsibility or have

actively resisted citizens’ initiatives to institute a reconciliation process. [28] Nevertheless, the Hokkaido Forum’s activities constitute an important example of how initiatives by citizens groups can start a reconciliation process that the government and corporations eventually join, indeed, may feel pressured to join, at a later stage.



**Post-event workshop led by Tonohira Yoshihiko:  
Visiting the cemetery of people who died in  
Shumarinai**

The Hokkaido Forum plans to continue its activities in the return of remains as well as to raise the prominence of the issue in public discourse. Tonohira concluded as follows:

“I see our actions as a matter of faith. Our tears in front of the ashes do not console the bereaved. We need not only an apology, but also a common historical consciousness. Japanese and Korean, Japanese and Chinese have to share a common historical consciousness. ... We have to get across our dark history to young people through workshops and other educational efforts.

The remains of victims become nameless over time. Even if a temple has been storing the ashes in a labelled

pot, sometimes the name disappears from the pot with time. Then nobody knows whose ashes they are, and how the person died. It is very sad. Sometimes the ashes are moved to smaller pots. The ashes belong with the victims' families, so we have to return them as soon as possible.

Before, our organization and activities were regarded as anti-establishment and dangerous. However, the atmosphere in Japan has been changing and gradually our initiatives are being recognized. Recently, there has been a tendency to support the return of ashes. The Japanese government cannot ignore our activities. It bears war responsibility, so it must take the initiative. However, practically speaking, civil society groups have been taking responsibility thus far."

## Conclusions

In the long and complex process of reconciliation, civil society and citizens groups have a vital role to play in healing the wounds caused by Japanese colonialism and war in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The symposium and the related activities of groups involved in its organization reveal that there are many conscientious Japanese who dedicate significant portions of their lives to healing wounds caused by actions, which for many, were carried out before they were born. These are important aspects of contemporary Japanese society that are all too easily overlooked in the broader criticisms of how Japan as a nation has addressed war and colonial responsibility issues. Yet surveys of these groups' activities reveal just how much remains to be done before the achievement of the symposium's aims: reconciliation and a sustainable peace in East Asia.

The symposium was also revealing in its relation

to the G8 Summit. It was timed to coincide with the G8 Summit but ultimately had a very different agenda. However, the symposium constitutes a concrete example of certain unintended effects of the Hokkaido Summit that was largely overlooked in mainstream media coverage and will continue to be significant long after the Summit has faded in memory. The Summit gave citizens groups a springboard for furthering their activities. In the case of the symposium "Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society", one of the key achievements has been the establishment of greater links and cooperation between peace and reconciliation groups in Hokkaido and beyond.

The international media's coverage of the Hokkaido Toyako Summit might lead us to believe that it was of marginal long-term significance in terms of the policy decisions made by G8 leaders to tackle issues such as the environment and poverty. But from the perspective of Hokkaido, the Summit stimulated many new and continuing initiatives among citizens groups whose long-term results have yet to be fully appreciated.

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## Notes

[1] Hokkaido Forum is a citizens' group that tries to promote improved relations with Japan's neighbours (especially Korea and China) by addressing Japan's history of aggression in Asia at the grassroots level. Its dues-paying members engage in citizen-led initiatives to address war responsibility. The Hokkaido Forum's activities have featured in other *Japan Focus* articles: William Underwood, "[New Era for Japan-Korea History Issues](#)"; Kim Yeong-Hwang, "[Promoting Peace and Reconciliation as a Citizen of East Asia](#)" (Kim served as Korean-Japanese translator for the Symposium). The Joint East Asia Work Shop for Peace is described in Tonohira Yoshihiko (2004) *Wakamono-tachi no higashi Ajia sengen: Shumarinai ni tsudou Ni-Kan-Zainichi-Ainu* (The Young People's Declaration on East Asia: Japanese, Koreans, Zainichi Koreans and Ainu meet in Shumarinai), Tokyo: Kamogawa shuppan.

[2] Interview with Hiroshi Oda (conducted by Lukasz Zablonksi, 18 July 2008).

[3] See Nishino Rumiko, "[The Women's Active Museum on War and Peace](#)", *Japan Focus*.

[4] Kanazawa's testimony is available in Shinbun Akahata Shakaibu (2006) *Moto Nihonhei ga kataru "Daitoa Senso" no Shinso* (Imperial Army Veterans Tell the Truth About the Greater East Asian War), Tokyo: Nihon Kyosanto Chuo Iinakai Shuppankyoku, pp. 55-58.

[5] Interview with Kobayashi Hisatomo (conducted by Lukasz Zablonksi, 18 June 2008).

[6] Symposium Program, p. 6.

[7] The literature on reconciliation fits within many fields and offers a variety of perspectives that reflect the conflict that concerns the researchers. For example, Hamber and van der Merwe, with reference to the Peace and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, refer to five definitions of reconciliation: the dissolving of racial identities; promoting inter-communal understanding; the religious (in this case Christian) process of confession, repentance and forgiveness; a human rights approach based on justice; and reconciliation as community building. McKay adopts a gendered approach to reconciliation and outlines how reconciliation is so often channelled through male-dominated power structures that make gender injustice a part of national/male-centred reconciliation. She draws on case studies such as the "comfort women" and even the offering of women as brides to former enemies as part of a "reconciliation" process. Van Ness, by contrast, focuses on reconciliation as process in the context of Japan and China and offers strategies for reconciliation rather than definitions, such as "Seize the time", "Insist on reciprocity" and "Link the past to the present and future". John Paul Lederach introduces the important concept reconciliation as "a social space". "Reconciliation is a locus, a place where



people and things come together.” (p. 29). This construction illustrates why geographical, cultural and political distances greatly affect the dynamics of reconciliation. Reconciliation between aborigines and Australians of European descent, therefore, poses substantially different geopolitical challenges to Sino-Japanese reconciliation, because one process occurs within contemporary national boundaries while the other crosses them. Finally, Alan Smith, writing in the comparative education journal *Compare*, discusses the role of education in the process of reconciliation. These brief examples illustrate the diverse concepts of “reconciliation”, which will only increase given other linguistic, cultural and religious contexts.

Brandon Hamber and Hugo van der Merwe, “What is this thing called reconciliation”, *Reconciliation in Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1998, online (accessed 15 September 2008); Susan McKay, “Gender Justice and Reconciliation”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 23, No. 5, pp.561-570, 2000; Peter Van Ness, “Reconciliation between China and Japan: the key link to security cooperation in East Asia”, *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2007, pp. 7-13; John Paul Lederach (1997) *Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press; Alan Smith, “Education in the twenty-first century: Conflict, reconstruction and reconciliation”, *Compare* Vol. 35, No. 4, December 2005, pp. 373-391.

[8] See the [website](#) of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.

[9] Sven Saaler gives a figure of 15-17 percent subscribing to an “affirmative view of the war” (p. 163). Seaton, meanwhile, using different definitions calculates that conservative and nationalist views on the war account for about one third of public opinion, with nationalists a small minority. Sven Saaler (2005) *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion: the History*

*Textbook Controversy and Japanese Society*, Munich: Iudicium, p. 163; Philip Seaton (2007) *Japan’s Contested War Memories: the “memory rifts” in historical consciousness of World War II*, London: Routledge, Chapter 1.

[10] Jeff Kingston, for example, writes: “Ian Buruma notes that one of the main obstacles to Japan’s reconciliation with its neighbors is that the Japanese people are divided over war memory. Competing narratives about the past that divides Japan from Asia sends mixed signals, muddying war memory, vitiating gestures of contrition and thus preventing reconciliation based on a shared view of the past.” Jeff Kingston, “Awkward Talisman: War Memory, Reconciliation and Yasukuni”, *East Asia* (2007) 24: 295-318, p. 316.

[11] Oda Hiroshi, Symposium Programme, p. 16.

[12] “Colonization” remains a debated term in the context of Hokkaido. Richard Siddle notes that despite the use of the word *takushoku* (“colonialism”) into the early twentieth century, the most common term used today is *kaitaku* (“development”), which masks the violence that underpinned the Wajin presence in Ainu Mosir. Siddle criticizes the arguments of Mark Peattie that Hokkaido was a “settlement colony” and that the Japanese government was settling “its own lands with its own peoples”. Instead, he describes the incorporation of Ainu Mosir into the modern Japanese state using the heading “The transformation of Ezochi: from foreign land to internal colony”. However, the symposium programme was implicitly critical of this interpretation by citing the position of Inoue Katsuo: “It is said that Hokkaido became a ‘domestic colony’. But, Ainu people were dispossessed of their land. Calling Hokkaido a ‘domestic colony’ takes an explicitly Japanese point of view. Actually, Hokkaido was a ‘colony’ created by Japanese intruders”. This is closer to the terminology of Brett Walker, who uses the word the “conquest” of Ainu lands. An even more forthright argument would be that the

assimilationist policies of Meiji Japan, racist Social Darwinism that almost willed the Ainu to be a “dying race”, and refusal (until just before the G8 Summit) to recognize the Ainu as an indigenous people constituted a national policy verging on cultural (if not actual) genocide.

Richard Siddle (1996) *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*, London: Routledge, pp. 51-2; Mark Peattie (1984) “Japanese Attitudes Towards Colonialism, 1895-1945” in Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (eds) *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 80; Inoue Katsuo (2006) *Bakumatsu, Ishin* (The End of the Shogunate and the Imperial Restoration), Tokyo: Iwanami, p. 234; Brett L. Walker (2001) *The Conquest of Ainu Lands, Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion 1590-1800*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[13] See Iewallen, Ann-Elise, “Bones of Contention: Negotiating Anthropological Ethics within Fields of Ainu Refusal”, *Critical Asian Studies* 39:4 (2007), 509-540.

[14] *The Japan Times*, “Diet officially declares Ainu indigenous”, 7 June 2008.

[15] The establishment of the Continuing the Miracle of Fushun Society is described in Kumagai Shinichiro (2005) *Naze kagai wo kataru no ka: Chugoku kikansha renrakukai no sengoshi* (Why Talk of Aggression? A postwar history of the Chukiren), Tokyo: Iwanami Booklet No. 659, pp. 58-71; see also David McNeill, “A Foot Soldier in the War Against Forgetting Japanese Wartime Atrocities”, *Japan Focus*.

[16] This stance is understandable coming from a lawyer representing war victims, but its demands for an inherently political role for judges are problematic. The role of judges is not to rule on historical responsibility or historical consciousness. It is to rule on the legal validity of the claims presented before them. It is the role of judges to interpret the letter of the law,

not to write the law. If the law is inadequate it is the role of politicians to rewrite it. If there are statutes of limitations, or if the postwar treaties signed between Japan and its former enemies/colonies are interpreted as being the law of the land, then judges have little alternative but to rule on the side of the government and reject the plaintiffs’ case. In many instances, judges have commented in summing up that the evidence provided by the plaintiffs clearly proved their version of events, but that the accuracy of the Japanese government’s version of history was not the legal matter under question. For a more detailed summary of Kang’s arguments, see William Underwood and Kang Jian, “Japan’s Top Court Poised to Kill Lawsuits by Chinese War Victims”, *Japan Focus*.

[17] Seaton, *Japan’s Contested War Memories*, Chapter 3.

[18] See for example, *Japan Times*, “No new sex slave apology: Abe”, 6 March 2007.

[19] By coincidence, Seaton’s interview with Vietnam veteran Allen Nelson for the paper “Vietnam and Iraq in Japan” presents another example (although not mentioned in the original paper). Nelson had helped to place a young German ASRP volunteer in an old people’s home for Jewish people in New York. Many still had the tattoos on their arms from their time incarcerated in concentration camps. Their hostility toward the young German volunteer frequently reduced her to tears. But she persisted because she said she understood their pain. When she left at the end of her two years, she was showered with presents by all the residents of the home. The work of reconciliation is often long and painful, but ultimately rewarding. Interview with Allen Nelson (20 February 2008).

[20] Azuma’s story is told in Ian Buruma (1995 edn) *Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, London: Vintage, pp. 129-35.

- [21] Mari Yamamoto, “[Japan’s Grassroots Pacifism](#)”, *Japan Focus*.
- [22] Interview with Christian Staffa (conducted by Lukasz Zablonksi, 10 July 2008).
- [23] William Underwood, “[Names, Bones and Unpaid Wages \(2\): Seeking Redress for Korean Forced Labour](#),” *Japan Focus*.
- [24] This section follows closely Tonohira’s article in the Symposium Programme and is supplemented by an interview with Tonohira Yoshihiko (conducted by Lukasz Zablonksi, 24 June 2008).
- [25] William Underwood, “[Names, Bones and Unpaid Wages \(1\): Seeking Redress for Korean Forced Labour](#),” *Japan Focus*.
- [26] William Underwood, “[New Era for Japan-Korea History Issues](#)”, *Japan Focus*.
- [27] NHK *Newswatch* 9, 22 January 2008. This programme featured a 10-minute segment about the return of the Yutenji remains and the activities of the Hokkaido Forum, including an interview with Tonohira Yoshihiko.
- [28] William Underwood, “[The Aso Mining Company in World War II](#)”, *Japan Focus*; “[Mitsubishi, Historical Revisionism and Japanese Corporate Resistance to Chinese Forced Labor Redress](#)”, *Japan Focus*; Christopher Reed, “[Family Skeletons: Japan’s Foreign Minister and Forced Labor by Koreans and Allied POWs](#)”, *Japan Focus*.