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The Dead Bedevil Japan-Korea Relations

Shimbun Yomiuri

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By Yomiuri Shimbun

[Japan's relations with both North and South Korea remain bedevilled by unresolved issues from the turbulent twentieth century, as illustrated by two cases concerning the remains of victims of a policy of abduction and exploitation across national borders. In the case of North Korea, negotiations over normalization remain stalled over the issue of the remains returned by North Korea in 2004 that supposedly belonged to Yokota Megumi, abducted to North Korea in 1977 (See Disputed Bones). In the case of South Korea, under heavy pressure from Seoul Japan has belatedly moved to settle the cases of some of the hundreds of thousands abducted from the Korean peninsula in the 1930s and 1940s as forced labor, many of who died, their remains being simply deposited in Japanese temples. Other issues still only slowly being attended to from the twentieth century that are addressed in the two articles from Yomiuri that follow include Korean victims of the atomic bomb devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and a significant historical monument plundered by Japan from Korea and now about to be returned (to North Korea). Japan Focus]

Japanese Government to return bones of Korean soldiers to South Korea

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The government will move to resolve historical issues with South Korea, including returning the remains of Korean soldiers and civilian employees of the military, in an attempt to ease anti-Japanese sentiment and smooth the way for a Japan-South Korea summit scheduled for late June, sources close to the government said Sunday.

An agreement struck in 1969 between the two governments saw the remains of 8,835 people handed over to South Korea by the end of March.

The government plans to work toward returning the remains of 1,136 Koreans held at Yutenji Temple in Tokyo whose families have not been traced.

The government has taken a hands-off approach toward Koreans who died in Japan after being employed as forced labor by Japanese companies during the war on the grounds it had no direct employment relationship with the workers.

However, at a Japan-South Korea summit meeting in December, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirosaid in response to a request by South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun that he would take an active approach to the collection and return of the remains.
As a result, the government has sought to identify the location of the remains, including conducting a survey of about 100 private companies believed to have used Korean forced laborers, according to the sources.

A Japan-South Korea deputy vice ministerial meeting in May will discuss concrete ways to hand over the remains, the sources said.

The government will also increase assistance to Koreans currently living in South Korea who were affected by the atomic bombings in Japan, according to the sources.

In concrete terms, the government will revise the current stipulation that A-bomb victims cannot receive health care allowances unless they submit their applications in the Japan to allow them apply for the assistance at diplomatic missions abroad, the sources said.

At a Japan-South Korean foreign ministerial meeting held in April, Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka said the government would consider allowing A-bomb victims living in other countries to apply for health care assistance at Japanese diplomatic missions.

The government already funds the travel and accommodation expenses of Korean A-bomb victims receiving treatment in Japan.
The government also will study new measures to assist Koreans who were forced to stay in Sakhalin after World War II when South Korea had no diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union to visit or return to their homeland for good, according to the sources.
Some of the Korean laborers went to Sakhalin to work for Japanese companies during the war.

The Japanese government has funded the operation of a joint project established in 1989 comprising the Japanese and South Korean Red Cross societies and other organizations to assist Koreans in Sakhalin visit or return to South Korea.

The government also will consider returning a Korean monument now in Yasukuni Shrine, the sources said.

The monument was built in the current North Korea to commemorate Korean volunteers' victory over Japanese troops sent by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the 16th century.

Japanese soldiers are believed to have brought the monument to Japan during the Russo-Japanese war.

South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki Moon said that the return of the monument would improve not only South Korea-Japan relations but also ties between

the two Koreas.

Yasukuni Shrine said that it would return the monument if Tokyo, Pyongyang and Seoul worked out an agreement.

This article appeared in The Yomiuri Shimbun, May 16, 2005.

Japan Set to Return Battle Monument to South Korea

The Yomiuri Shimbun

A Korean stone monument that was brought to Japan during the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese War likely will be returned to South Korea this summer, government sources said Saturday.

Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirois expected to convey the government's intention to South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun during their summit meeting scheduled for June 20 in Seoul.

The Buggwan Grand Battle Monument, which was found in an area that now lies in northern North Korea, describes the bravery of local volunteer soldiers in fighting against Japan during Toyotomi Hideyoshi's invasion in the late 16th century.

The 2.1-meter-tall monument now stands in the garden of Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. It is believed an Imperial Japanese Army officer discovered the monument and took it back to Japan during the Russo-Japanese War. It was later donated to the shrine.

South Korea has told the Japanese government that it wants the monument returned by Aug. 15, the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Seoul has proposed talks on the monument with Pyongyang with the aim of returning the monument to its original place. If the negotiations between the two sides proceed smoothly, the monument will be returned to its original location after a century abroad.
During his talks with Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka in Kyoto last month, South Korean Foreign and Trade Minister Ban Ki Moon said, "If the return is realized, it would contribute to improved relations not only between South Korea and Japan, but also between North and South Korea."

Some Japanese lawmakers are cautious about handing over the monument, saying it would increase anti-Japanese sentiments in South Korea. However, since there have been growing calls in South Korea for the monument's return, Tokyo has become more inclined to hand over the stone, the sources said.

The shrine also has agreed to the government's plan in principle.

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