

History and Reconciliation:  
Japan-Korea versus France-Algeria

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History, peace and reconciliation: a growing quantity of research on these topics have been carried out in the past decade in both East Asia and Europe. Nevertheless, very few of these works have attempted a comparison between these two areas. This presentation is part of a collective project initiated by British and Japanese scholars trying to look at post-war and postcolonial reconciliation processes in a comparative perspective. Beside researchers from various countries, people who directly experienced the war, as well as reconciliation activists, took part in the project. Its approach was therefore transnational and multilayered. Reconciliation was studied from a variety of angles: history and reconciliation, education and reconciliation, memory and reconciliation, war responsibility and reconciliation, and so forth. My own contribution on “Japan-Korea versus France-Algeria” was a comparison between two former colonial “couples” which have never been confronted in regard to processes of reconciliation.

The results we have achieved were published in 2011 in a Japanese book, edited by KUROSAWA Fumitaka and Ian NISH, entitled *History and Reconciliation (Rekishī to wakai, Tōkyō daigaku, shuppankai, 2011)*.

### *Japan and Germany*

Japan's attitude toward war memories is often compared to that of Germany. While the latter is said to have faced courageously its past, the former is often described as having tried to escape such a sincere confrontation. While Germany is viewed as a country having truly and sincerely reconciled with its former victims, and having successfully introduced a real peace education based on keen remorse, Japan is usually portrayed as a land refusing to acknowledge its past mischief, provoking repeatedly its neighbours and its former victims, and educating its citizens to peace through self-victimisation rather than true reflection upon its past deeds.

Of course, a comparison between Japan and Germany is legitimate. After all, the two countries were allied during World War II, and there were many similarities in their prewar and wartime conditions. And after the war, both were occupied and demilitarised, before enjoying a swift economic recovery.

### *Japan-Korea, France-Algeria*

Nevertheless, to focus solely on a Japan-Germany comparison is also misleading. Japan's modern history until 1945 was not only a history of war, but also of colonialism. Japan was at war with China between 1937 and 1945 or with the US between 1941 and 1945, but it was never at war, for instance, with Korea. Korea was a Japanese colony, a territory annexed to Japan in 1910 and part of the Japanese empire until 1945. Thus Korea was never a war adversary of Japan. On the contrary, Korea's people and resources were mobilised in support of the Japanese war effort.

Japanese colonialism in Korea was motivated by ideas similar to the policy implemented by the French in Algeria. Both Korea and Algeria were an integral part of the national territory, and the fate of the two provinces was to be total assimilation. The Japanese modern takeover of Korea was a colonial enterprise, and therefore we must also look into the process of reconciliation that took place since the liberation through a decolonisation paradigm.

### *The strength of the colonial relationship*

One of the most striking similarities between the two colonial situations may be the specificity of the relationship, the strength of the link connecting the two colonial partners. Algeria was a French colony for more than one hundred thirty years (1830-1962). Algeria was the oldest and most important French possession, it had an enormous strategic value, and it was also a symbol of France's greatness.

Algeria was only one of the many overseas French possessions, but it was also standing apart. Algeria was not defined as a colony: it was an integral part of France, made of three *départements* (prefectures). Algeria was not under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office, but under that of the Interior Ministry - like any other French *département*. And when in 1954, the Algerian insurrection broke out, François Mitterrand, who was then Interior Minister said simply, to justify the measures taken to restore the order: "*L'Algérie, c'est la France !*" - "Algeria is France !".

And this was indeed true. This was the reality of the time, first from an administrative point of view, but also, and even more important, from a demographic point of view. In 1954, one million French and other European settlers have been living in Algeria for generations and were seeing Algeria as their one and only home.

Algeria had been gradually conquered between 1830 and 1871. This was a very bloody endeavour, without any comparison to the Japanese overtake of Korea - which was much shorter and much less violent. In 1871, Algeria, which was until then ruled by the military, passed into the hands of a civil administration, and was since then defined as an extension of France on the other side of the Mediterranean, a vast territory due to be settled by Europeans and assimilated to France.

The similarities with the Korean situation are striking. Korea also was defined as an inalienable part of the Japanese territory. In 1910, the Korean peninsula had been "attached to, unified with" (*heigō* 併合) Japan. In the same way as Algeria, Korea was not defined as a "colony" (*shokuminchi* 植民地), but as an integral part of the Japanese territory.

Like Algeria for France, Korea was seen as one of the major achievements of modern Japan. The links between Korea and Japan were presented as very

old, dating back to ancient times (much older than the links between France and Algeria).

Even more important, and here the similarity with Algeria is again striking, Korea was seen as vital for Japan's national security. Since the very beginning of the Meiji period, Japan had considered the stability of Korea as a fundamental element of its national security. Two wars have been fought around the Korean question, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), and the annexation of 1910 was largely the result of this obsession of modern Japan with the Korean issue, a result of a view seeing Korea the key to Japan's national security.

Another commonality with Algeria is the fact that Japan was seeing itself as carrying a civilising mission, like France speaking about bringing the Arabs gradually towards modernity. In a similar way, Japan aspired to guide the Korean Peninsula along the way it had itself successfully followed since the Meiji Restoration.

Last but not least, Korea, like Algeria, was populated by a vast number of settlers. In 1945, some 750 000 Japanese were living in Korea.

### *Two categories of people*

Along these similarities, there were also important differences between the two colonial situations. First, from an administrative point of view, the legal situation of Korea was quite different from that of Algeria. Korea was not made up of Japanese prefectures, but was part of what was then called *gaichi* 外地, the "external territories." These were Japanese territories "governed by laws other than those of Japan proper." Together with Korea - Taiwan, Sakhalin, the Kwantung province, and the South Pacific Islands (*Nan.yō shotō* 南洋諸島) were also defined as *gaichi*.

This legal status was linked to an ideological construct of racial proximity, which is totally different than what we encounter in Algeria. The Japanese saw the Koreans as lost kinsmen, lost brethren, who were eventually intended to return to the original fold of a common civilisation. These ideas were already present at the time of the annexation in 1910, and they would form later the basis of the assimilation policies (*kōminka Seisaku* 皇民化政策) enforced after 1938.

No such discourse of racial proximity was present in Algeria. Algeria was meant to be assimilated to France by means of a French colonisation. Only later on would come a progressive assimilation into French culture of a native Arab elite. The official colonial structure in Algeria was therefore much more discriminatory than the one put in place in Korea. In Algeria, there were two main categories of people: the French citizens, who were enjoying full civil rights - (to these were added in 1870 the Algerian Jews). And the local natives, called the "Arabs," which were ruled by a totally different set of laws, *le Code de l'Indigénat* - the Native Code.

When the Japanese talk of assimilation, they have in mind the native Korean population. When the French talk of assimilation, they have in mind the French and European settlers (and also the Jewish population), but not the Muslim Algerians. This is only for a very distant future, if ever.

This does not mean that daily life in colonial Korea was egalitarian. We all know how much discrimination the native Korean population did suffer. But from a strictly legal point of view, all residents of Korea were submitted to the same laws - which were different from the laws of Japan proper, but which applied both to native Koreans and Japanese settlers and residents. In Korea, the legal criteria was not race, but place of residence.

This fact is even more striking if we look at the Koreans who were residing in Japan proper. They suffered hardship and discrimination, but theoretically, they had equal rights with the native Japanese, including the right to vote and to stand for parliamentary and municipal elections. While the Japanese installed in Korea were deprived of these rights because of their place of residence.

The reason to this paradoxical situation lies in the ideology of racial proximity evoked above. As Peter Duus has shown, in the case of Korea race was not a dividing factor, but an integrating one. Racial proximity was the ultimate justification of the annexation of Korea and of the assimilation policy.

It should be added that neither the situation in Korea nor in Algeria was static. The status of Korea was partly redefined during the War, as part of (and compensation for) the brutal assimilation policy enforced at the time. As a result, for the first time Korean MPs from Korea proper are elected at the Diet (there are Japanese Koreans members of the Diet already in the 1930s), and

new avenues of upward mobility, particularly within the military hierarchy, opened for native Koreans.

Similar measures were taken in Algeria only in 1947, after the Second World War, in response to severe riots which had occurred in 1945. In 1947, an "Algerian Assembly" was established. It was composed of two equal forums of sixty delegates each, one representing the French citizens and a small minority of Muslims who had become French, the other representing the rest of the Muslim population. Despite these discriminatory arrangements, Algerians responded enthusiastically to those new opportunities. The enthusiasm was such that the French, fearing (justly) a nationalist victory, chose to fix the results of the 1948 elections.

### *Time gap, decolonisation*

We see here an interesting difference in the time when political reforms were implemented: in Korea during the war, in Algeria after WWII. This time gap is also one of the important differences between the two colonial situations. Algeria was colonised much earlier than Korea (1830 vs. 1910), and liberated later (1945 vs. 1962). Thus, the mutual Franco-Algerian embrace was much stronger than the Japanese-Korean one. Generations of settlers have been living in Algeria, while many Japanese settlers experienced during their own lifespans both conquest and defeat.

However, the relative brevity of the Japanese colonisation of Korea also increased its intensity. Moreover, unlike Algeria, which was colonised in the first half of the nineteenth century, in Korea modern techniques of the twentieth century could be immediately implemented. The Japanese also could also take advantage of the previous Western colonial experience and apply in Korea methods of colonial government already tested elsewhere.

This time gap is also crucial in terms of the decolonisation process. The liberation of Korea was a direct result of the Japanese defeat in World War II. Korea regained its independence with Japan's surrender to the Allied Powers on 15 August 1945.

In Algeria, on the other hand, on 8 May 1945, the day WWII ended, demonstrations for independence broke out all across the country, and the massacres perpetrated by the French in Setif and Guelma triggered a cycle of extreme violence. This was to be the prelude to the "Algerian war," which

started in 1954 and ended in 1962 with the country's independence. This was an extremely brutal conflict. 27,500 French soldiers were killed, a thousand missing. Some 6,500 French civilians were also killed or missing. On the Algerian side, the official death toll stands at one million and a half, the actual number being probably between 250,000 and 500,000 dead. Besides, between 30,000 and 100,000 *harkis* (Muslim Algerian auxiliaries formed by France against the FLN) were also be killed after the cease-fire.

This conflict had huge consequences, both for France and for Algeria. In Algeria, the war, until today, represents the ultimate legitimation of the existence of the Nation. In France, the loss of Algeria was seen as an amputation of the homeland. Besides, the Algerian brought for a regime change in France, with the creation of the Fifth Republic, which still governs France until today.

Moreover, the conflict directly affected a huge number of people. One and a half million French soldiers fought in Algeria, and on their side were some 100,000 *harkis*. At the end of the war, one million Europeans left Algeria and returned to France. It is said that today in France four to five million people are still directly affected by the war in Algeria. In addition, in France there are today between 4 and 5 million North Africans, among them some 1.5 million Algerians. All this explains the passion and drama that still characterise the Franco-Algerians relationship.

### *Occultation*

Despite the magnitude of these events, the term "war" was officially used in France for the first time only in 1999. During decades, the Algerian War was almost taboo. It was a white page of history. In Algeria, the war itself was celebrated as a national myth, but the reality of events was deeply modified. The war against France became a "revolution" and the civil war was omitted.

Korea experienced a very different decolonisation process. The liberation happened suddenly on 15 August 1945, as a result of the Japanese surrender. A great disorder followed, with the mass repatriation of Japanese from Korea and Koreans from Japan, but altogether the process was peaceful. For Korea, the real violence was yet to come, with the Korean War (1950-1953). In Algeria, the internal violence would come much later, with the civil war which started in 1991, and has not really ended yet.

Back to 1945. For Japan, the trauma of the loss of Korea was diluted in the general trauma of the defeat. The first two decades after the end of the war (1945-1965) were, in Japan, a period of almost total indifference toward Korea. This extraordinary phenomenon expressed a strong desire for oblivion. Korea seemed to evaporate from Japanese consciousness. The neighbouring peninsula, which had been one of the main topics of interest since the 1880s, had suddenly ceased to exist. Even the terrible war that ravaged the former colony provoked little interest. And incidents directly involving Japan, as the capture of fishing boats that entered Korean waters, aroused only indifference among the general public. This indifference helps explain why the conversations to a normalisation of relations, which opened in 1951 under American pressure, concluded only in 1965.

Thus, even if the reasons were different, a similar blackout toward occurred in France and Japan at the end of the colonial period.

#### *An overabundance of memory*

Since then, things have changed a lot. Generally speaking, France and Algeria have still a very tense relationship. The two main factors are first the terrible Algerian civil war that began in 1991. The violence didn't spare the French territory. Besides, the French balanced between the necessity to fight islamist terrorism and their condemnation of the arbitrary violence of the Algerian government. This was, and is still is, a source of tension.

Second, and this especially true since 2005, history, memory and repentance have become a central part of the Franco-Algerian argument. If, after the war, silence and concealment characterised the attitude toward the colonial period, now it is the opposite, there is an overabundance of memory, and also a "war of memories" between different narratives.

We can see this right now in the way France and Algeria are commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of Algeria. This is quite similar to the situation prevalent between Japan and South Korea, who commemorated in 2010 the centennial of the annexation.

But it must be also said that Japan and Korea have, in many ways, a much closer relationship than France and Algeria - due to the similarity of their political, economic and social systems, due to their military alliance with the United States, due to their shared concerns toward North Korea (and China).

Nevertheless, history and memory still overshadow the present Japanese-Korean relationship, as we can see these very days with the Dokdo/Takeshima islands dispute.

Today, the Franco-Algerian and Japanese-Korean couples are therefore two variants of a very similar post-colonial situation. The relationship inside each of these couples is mainly dictated by geopolitical factors and policy choices. In this context, the memory of the colonial past is often manipulated for internal or external purposes. But these debates and arguments are also the expression of wounds, which are yet to heal. The colonial past is still casting its shadow both on the former colonisers and on their former victims.