

THREE TIGERS, ONE MOUNTAIN



**A JOURNEY THROUGH
THE BITTER HISTORY AND
CURRENT CONFLICTS OF
CHINA, KOREA,
AND JAPAN**

MICHAEL BOOTH

**AUTHOR OF *THE ALMOST
NEARLY PERFECT PEOPLE***



THREE TIGERS, ONE MOUNTAIN

A JOURNEY THROUGH
THE BITTER HISTORY AND
CURRENT CONFLICTS OF
CHINA, KOREA,
AND **JAPAN**

MICHAEL BOOTH



ST. MARTIN'S
PRESS
NEW YORK

[Begin Reading](#)

[Table of Contents](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

**Thank you for buying this
St. Martin's Press ebook.**

To receive special offers, bonus content,
and info on new releases and other great reads,
sign up for our newsletters.

[Sign Up](#)

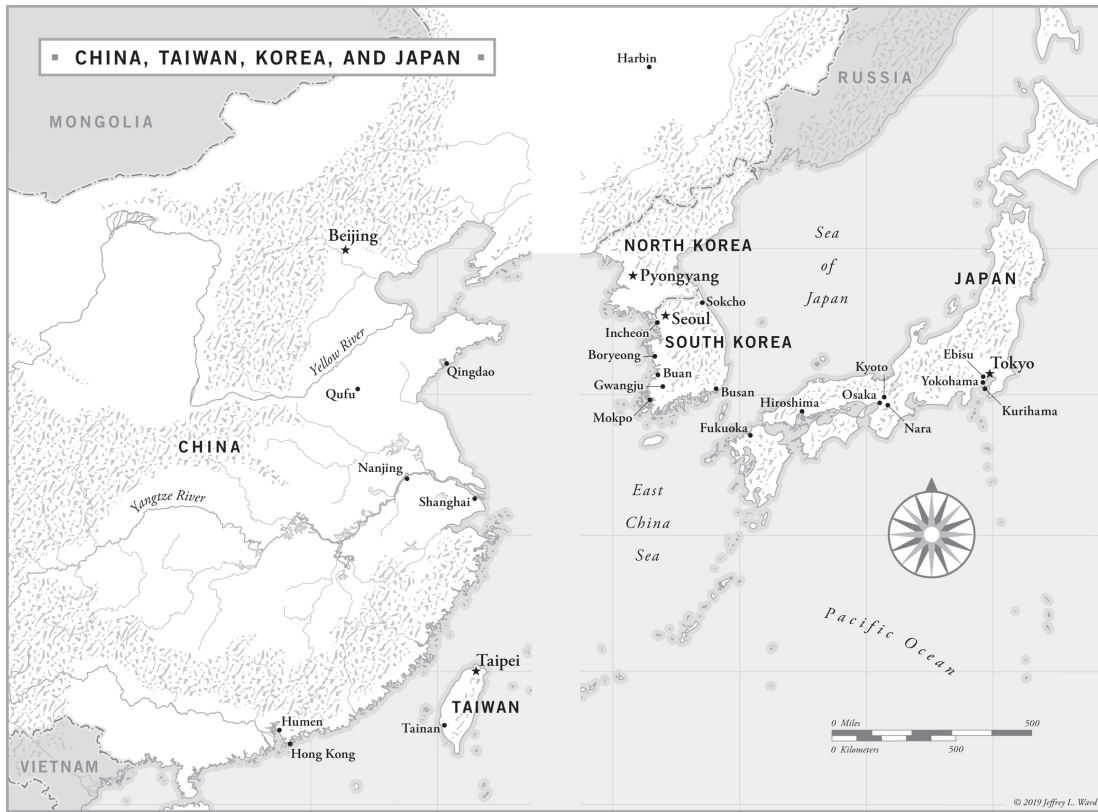
Or visit us online at
us.macmillan.com/newslettersignup

For email updates on the author, click [here](#).

The author and publisher have provided this e-book to you for your personal use only. You may not make this e-book publicly available in any way. **Copyright infringement is against the law. If you believe the copy of this e-book you are reading infringes on the author's copyright, please notify the publisher at: us.macmillanusa.com/piracy.**

Two tigers cannot share the same mountain.

—ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB



PROLOGUE

The two tiny dots of blue icing, each barely a millimeter in diameter—they were the problem. They were a component of a dessert, a rather appetizing-looking mango mousse entitled “Spring of the People,” which, it had been announced, was to be served at a dinner in honor of the leaders of South and North Korea. The dots were virtually invisible, but the Japanese saw them, and they were not happy.

“It is extremely regrettable and not acceptable,” said a Japanese foreign ministry spokesperson when news of the dots leaked ahead of the historic meeting in April 2018. “We have asked that the dessert not be served.”

The Japanese made a formal complaint and lobbied hard for the mousse to be struck from the menu, to no avail. Indeed, on the day of the dinner, Moon Jae-in, president of the Republic of Korea, and Kim Jong-un, leader of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, applauded with special enthusiasm as their pudding was served.

The reason for the Japanese indignation was that the dots were part of a chocolate map of the Korean Peninsula. They represented a group of disputed islands, really not much more than a few lumps of rock, located 177 miles off the east coast of South Korea. In Korea the rocks are known as the Dokdo Islands, in Japan as Takeshima, and in the English-speaking world as the Liancourt Rocks. Ownership of the islands is hotly disputed by Japan and South Korea. Korea’s claim goes back to the twelfth-century *Samguk Sagi*, the chronicles of their Three Kingdoms era. The Japanese say the islands have been used by their fishermen for hundreds of years and point out that South Korea’s claim was turned down by the Americans at the 1951 San Francisco Peace Conference.

Though the leaders of the two Koreas were technically at war at the time of the official dinner, and though one of them was a despot threatening

the security of East Asia and responsible for the deaths of thousands of his own people, on one topic they could agree wholeheartedly.

The Japanese could go whistle.

To the Koreans, North and South, those two dots of icing represented defiance of the former oppressor; to the Japanese, they were a needless provocation; to the Chinese, doubtless monitoring events closely, they were a heartening sign of the ongoing hostility between their two neighbors, as a strong Japan-Korea alliance would be highly threatening to Beijing.¹

I watched all this unfold on the TV news in my hotel room in Taipei, Taiwan, at the very end of my journey around this troubled neighborhood. With all I had seen and learned of the region's history by that stage, I had a fair idea of what the dessert meant. In those two little dots of icing, one could also see tens of millions of innocent people dead; the destruction of cities and the fall of empires; oppression, occupation, and exploitation, and above all, a festering animosity, which, at any moment, could develop into a devastating regional war with consequences for the world.

So why can't the nations of East Asia get along? How deep, really, is the enmity among Japan, Korea, and China, and what keeps it alive today? Whose interests are served by sabotaging the peace among these three Asian tigers? These are some of the questions that had prompted my journey through a part of the world that has fascinated me throughout my adult life.

Rhetoric is ramped up by political leaders and diplomats seemingly at will, their constituents react accordingly, and the rest of the world sighs at the predictable futility of it all. And the tension is growing. China is rapidly amassing the world's largest military, and its navy dominates the region's oceans; Japan's political rulers are attempting to overturn its pacifist constitution to permit a more aggressive military capability; and a unilateral declaration of independence from Taiwan would almost certainly prompt China to invade, with the potential to draw in America, which has tens of thousands of military personnel stationed in the region. And then of course there is the Little Rocket Man in Pyongyang, with his fat finger still supposedly poised over a nuclear button. And the bad blood in East Asia is not limited to its governments and military leaders. Hatred—proper,

visceral, blind hatred—simmer among the people of these countries, every once in a while erupting into violence.

In 2012, in the Chinese city of Xi'an in Shaanxi Province, a man, Li Jianli, aged fifty-one, was dragged from his car and beaten almost to death by a mob following the Japanese government's nationalization of some other disputed rocks in the sea, in this case the Senkaku Islands, which lie between Taiwan and Okinawa.² Li wasn't even Japanese; he just happened to be driving a Japanese car. The then Japanese ambassador to China, Uichiro Niwa, meanwhile, was fortunate to escape when his car was attacked in the streets of Beijing the same week.

Some of the popular protests are weekly affairs. During my journey I spent some time at a demonstration by a couple of hundred protesters outside the Japanese embassy against the sexual enslavement of women by the Japanese military during World War II; the demonstration has taken place every single Wednesday since 1992. A large part of the crowd comprised schoolchildren. One expects florid anti-Japanese rhetoric from the North Korean regime, but why is the anger concerning events that took place over seventy years ago still so vibrant among young South Koreans? And the hatred of Japanese by Koreans is reciprocated, at least by a minority, in Japan. Earlier on in my trip, in Yokohama, I had witnessed a convoy of black minivans pass me by, a tirade of anti-Korean invective spewing from their loudspeakers. This wasn't the first time I had seen such things in Japan. For many years various right-wing factions have been taking to the streets of Japanese cities to threaten and insult the ethnic communities, particularly in Osaka, home to the country's largest Korean population. But what could the Japanese possibly have against the Koreans? Were these merely tit-for-tat demonstrations, or was the hatred as deep on both sides of the Sea of Japan?

The disputes do not always involve Japan versus its neighbors; they are multidirectional. The installation in 2017 of an American missile defense system on a golf course south of Seoul had greatly antagonized Beijing, resulting in an immediate and precipitous drop in tourists traveling from China, enough to shake the South Korean economy. Although the missiles were ostensibly intended to counter the threat from North Korea, the

Chinese felt menaced by the presence of yet more American military technology so close to their borders, and they made their neighbors pay with unofficial trade sanctions.

These hostilities of course have their roots in the region's history, a litany of man-made hellishness featuring war, massacre, mass rape, biological weapons, firebombing, totalitarianism, famine, destitution, political oppression, torture, and atomic destruction, all of which remain vivid in the collective consciousness.

Remembrance of the kind which takes place in Hiroshima is one reflection of this, but historical memory takes many, often more controversial and divisive forms in this part of the world. Before I set off on my journey, I knew for instance that in the heart of Tokyo was a shrine, Yasukuni, where Japanese citizens, occasionally including prime ministers, pay their respects to the war criminals enshrined there, along with thousands of others who died fighting for Japan. This seemed to me odd and distasteful, but still did not really explain the broader picture of the seemingly mutually destructive relationships within the region. I also knew that more than seventy years after the end of World War II, China and South Korea were still seeking an apology from Japan for its crimes. But numerous Japanese prime ministers, as well as their emperor, had offered many variations of "sorry" to their former enemies, expressing "remorse" or "deep regret" on numerous occasions. Was there a bat squeak of insincerity, audible only to Koreans and Chinese, that meant that Japanese contrition was never deemed sufficient?

From the outside, this seems frustrating. When most of us in the rest of the world think of the Far East, we begin automatically to draw up a list of all that's wonderful and fascinating in its cultures: the artistic treasures of ancient civilizations, the wonderful food, and a carnival of contemporary temptations, from kimchi to Hello Kitty, "Gangnam Style" to smartphones. We think of the people who live there as industrious, ingenious, dutiful, respectful of traditional family values, and justly proud of a cultural heritage far older than our own. These may be Orientalist tropes, but with the obvious exception of the "mad neighbor," North Korea, nowadays at least we can say that these countries tend not to be prone to religious or

ideological extremism. There is so much to admire: China, having unceremoniously rejected Communism, will soon be crowned the world's largest economy; South Korea has gone from being an economic basketcase to the world's leading producer of our favorite high-tech consumer products, and in 2017, with the election of Moon Jae-in, showed itself to be a paragon of grassroots democracy; while Japan remains the most civilized and courteous society on earth, its products—physical and intangible—in demand around the globe. And not to forget Taiwan, the little island that could, which has flourished against seemingly insurmountable odds.

South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan ought to be the firmest of allies. All three are democracies with developed economies and significant mutual trade; all three are allies of, and militarily dependent upon, the United States, and share grave concerns about China. Yet the South Koreans in particular can at times seem obsessed with the Japanese to the point that, were you to meet them at a party, you would probably back away slowly. If it weren't for the Americans, many believe Seoul would ally with Beijing against Tokyo. On the other hand, although there are obvious ideological and political differences between China and its neighbors, all these countries are deeply intertwined culturally, genetically, and historically in ways that have been mutually beneficial for millennia, China having given its neighbors Confucian philosophy, rice cultivation, Buddhism, porcelain manufacture, and tea, as well as the secrets of metallurgy, written language, and the art of calligraphy.

In more recent times, Korea and Japan have also contributed to this great cultural exchange. From Korea have come K-pop, histrionic TV dramas, and a distinctive style of usually very violent movies, all of which have become massively popular throughout China, Japan, and beyond—and that together constitute the so-called *hallyu* or “Korean wave” phenomenon. In the last seventy years Japan has provided the economic model (as well as financial support and know-how) for South Korea, Taiwan, and more recently China to develop their manufacturing and exports. Wherever you travel in East Asia, you of course find Japanese restaurants, as well as retail brands like Uniqlo and Muji. Since I started visiting Japan twenty years ago, I have seen the streets of Tokyo fill up with Chinese and Korean

tourists there to eat and shop. On a recent visit, I sat next to a young Chinese couple in a restaurant in Osaka; they had come to Japan, they said, because they wanted to get their wedding rings made here. Everything was better quality in Japan. There are now an estimated one million Chinese living full-time in Japan, making them the country's largest ethnic minority (the Koreans are the second largest). Entire new mini-Chinatowns are emerging in parts of Tokyo, like the one in Ikebukuro.

In terms of who should shoulder the blame for this noxious pan-regional family feud, most point with a good deal of justification to the Japanese and their early twentieth-century expansionist crimes, yet no other people seemed to me today to be as peaceful, kind, respectful, and trustworthy as the Japanese. I recognize the solipsistic folly of extrapolating one's own by definition limited experience of a nation of 127 million in this way, but, well, the Japanese really are just so *nice*. Honestly. They are just *ridiculously* nice. How could anyone not like them? It genuinely troubled me that they are so loathed by their neighbors.

Nevertheless, before I started my journey, I believed I had a reasonable grasp of the charge sheet against Japan. I didn't, as it happens; it was worse than I thought. But if Europe and Israel could come to terms with Germany's war crimes, and the Philippines, Indonesia, and other countries also occupied by Japan no longer seemed to harbor such animosity toward the Japanese, if India and Britain could get along, if the Indonesians could consider the Dutch friends, why did Korea and China persist with their grudges? The disputed islands were a tricky issue, obviously, and South Korea also has an ongoing issue with the Chinese over some other half-submerged rocks (not to mention a dispute with North Korea over the Yellow Sea island Yeonpyeong), but if Spain could tolerate British rule in Gibraltar and the two Cypriot communities could co-exist, surely some independent, international commission could adjudicate such matters?

Was the continuing bad blood born of a genuine popular feeling, or was this geopolitical Mexican standoff being manipulated by the elites in Seoul, Pyongyang, Tokyo, and Beijing? The mass tourism, mutual trade, and exchange of cultural soft power would seem to suggest the latter, but a 2016 Pew Research Center survey suggests the former. According to the poll, 81

percent of Chinese people had an “unfavorable” impression of Japan and 86 percent of Japanese people felt the same way about the Chinese, while 77 percent of South Koreans had an unfavorable view of the Japanese.

I should mention one extra little toxic ingredient in the mix: notions of racial superiority. The Japanese believe they are special because their emperor is directly descended from the Sun Goddess, and their early-twentieth-century elite, led by Emperor Hirohito, parlayed this national foundation myth into a divine right to colonize their “lesser” neighbors by force. The Koreans, meanwhile, are convinced they are special because of what they believe to be their unique racial, or blood, purity, evidenced by the fact that over half of them share one of five surnames—Kim, Park, Lee, Seok, and Choi. The Chinese, meanwhile, believe they are the center of the universe and are taught from an early age that their culture is five thousand years old. And the leaders of Taiwan once believed they were the rightful rulers of China, though these days, not so much.

I happened to watch the Korean summit dessert fracas unfold on television in my hotel room in Taiwan when I was nearing the end of my journey around this beautiful, intoxicating, sometimes toxic part of the world. This was ironic, because it turns out that the Taiwanese actually quite admire the Japanese. They build statues to honor their former colonial rulers, not to shame them like the South Koreans do. I was hoping to find out why the Taiwanese feel so differently toward the Japanese than the Koreans and the Chinese, but, rather dispiritingly, in Taipei, at the end of my journey, I discovered yet another antagonistic relationship in the region, one I had been entirely unaware of prior to setting off. I don’t want to spoil it for you, but it turns out that the Taiwanese absolutely *loathe* the Koreans. As if they didn’t have enough to worry about, with China meddling in their elections, attempting to sabotage their economy, and threatening to invade at any moment, the Taiwanese still find the energy to perpetuate a major beef against their neighbors to the north, even though the two countries have never crossed swords.

But let’s rewind a few weeks. As I set out from Tokyo at the beginning of my trip around this sometime hellish neighborhood, I have many questions and concerns, but I put my faith in curiosity, an open mind, and

the power of asking better-informed folk stupid questions. Above all, I am excited to dive into this incredible region and visit these cultures, albeit slightly nervous about the ferries and the Mud Festival that awaits me in South Korea.

I plan to drive through Japan to Fukuoka, then take a ferry to South Korea, which I will explore in a zigzaggy fashion up to the border with North Korea, before traveling again by sea to China. In China, I will journey by train from Beijing to Harbin in the north, then back down to Hong Kong through the cities of the eastern seaboard that were the main focus of Japan's invasion of 1937 to 1945. From there I will cross to Taiwan, before ending up back in the Japanese capital. I have written about Japan before and have a great fondness for that country. But I am conscious that, after this trip, I may well end up with a very different view of the Japanese.

I begin my journey not in a place but a year: 1853. And at this early stage, of one thing I am convinced: if you go back far enough, everything is the fault of the Americans.

JAPAN

KURIHAMA

The assembled samurai and shogunate officials of the court of the Emperor Komei were captivated by the miniature locomotive, watching intently as the American engineers, Mr. Gay and Mr. Danby, spent the morning laying down its circular track on the Yokohama harborfront and attending to the Norris Works miniature locomotive. When the train's boiler had finally been lit and the required pressure achieved, its resulting motion and accompanying clouds of steam were indeed a novel and thrilling sight. The Japanese onlookers were "unable to repress a shout of delight at each blast of the whistle."

The train was a scale model, its carriages too small to accommodate even a child, but this was not going to cheat the samurai of their ride. Dressed in all their feudal finery, they "betook themselves to the roof," sitting atop the carriages, robes billowing, swords held carefully at their sides, to experience this Western technological marvel as it lapped the 350-foot, 18-gauge track at speeds of up to 20 miles per hour.

The train was part of the famous historic exchange of gifts between Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, envoy of President Fillmore of the United States, and the representatives of the Tokugawa shogunate, rulers of Japan, with Emperor Komei as the country's symbolic head. As well as Perry's own report, from which I quote, there is a splendidly evocative

painting of the events of March 1854 by a Japanese witness to the event, a panel of twelve scenes depicting this seismic clash of civilizations, the very moment Japan commenced its turbulent journey to modernity.

On its first visit the previous summer, Perry's fleet of so-called "Black Ships" had dropped anchor at Kurihama, south of Yokohama, just around the headland flanking the entrance to Tokyo Bay. Perry and his men were on an extraordinary mission: prize open a country that had been shut off to the world since the 1630s, a period known as *sakoku*, or "closed country."

I had read of this "prizing open" of Japan many times. This term had always evoked dealing with a stuck kitchen drawer or an obstinate oyster, but why, and by what means, does a sailor from a far-off land unilaterally dictate an epochal shift in foreign policy to a sovereign nation without a single weapon being discharged in anger?

For the why, we need to go back to 1848. Mexico had lost its two-year war with the United States and would forfeit California, the final piece of the United States' West-Coast puzzle, the Americans having relieved the British of Oregon a couple of years earlier. The United States now eyed the Pacific greedily. Beneath its waves there were whales galore, whose oil illuminated and lubricated the rapidly industrializing world and accounted for roughly 20 percent of the entire American economy at the time. But the more whales they harpooned—up to three thousand a year in the mid-1800s—the farther the Americans had to sail out into the Pacific. If they sailed far enough, the riches of China awaited: tea, silk, and porcelain, a trade upon which their great rival, the British, had grown rich over the past decades, with its colonies ranging from East India to Singapore and Hong Kong. America badly needed a foothold in this part of the world.

Looking in the other direction, to the east, the journey overland across America was now the shortest route between China and Europe, making the route "a highway for the world," as one contemporary report put it. But there was a problem. On the same latitude as the whaling port of San Francisco, in the way of China and its riches, lay a two-thousand-mile-long, hitherto impenetrable barrier: the Japanese archipelago. Japan had been effectively closed to the world since Portuguese missionaries had excited the locals with their radical ideas and threatened the power of the ruling

Tokugawa shogunate, the country's feudal military government. Christianity had been banned, along with all potentially meddlesome foreigners, aside from a handful of docile Dutch traders on a couple of hectares of artificial land in Nagasaki Harbor, and the Chinese of course. Not to trade with China would have been unthinkable. Any Japanese who left the islands without official permission faced death upon their return. Any foreigner attempting to land on Japanese territory was summarily sent packing, if they were lucky.

In 1846, US commodore James Biddle had sailed close to the entrance of Tokyo Bay seeking contact with the Japanese authorities to ask permission for American whaling ships to refuel and repair in Japanese harbors. He suffered the indignity of being towed back out to sea by the Japanese. Russia's attempts to make contact had been similarly rebuffed. The other key Western powers—France and Germany—were also keenly aware that whomever had access to the harbors of Japan controlled the Pacific.

But the seas around Japan's rocky coast were uncharted and notoriously dangerous, with treacherous currents and whirlpools. In 1848 the American whaler *Lagoda* had been wrecked off the coast of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost main island, and its crew were imprisoned. Several had died during their incarceration and the rest had been forced to trample upon a crucifix to prove their rejection of Christianity. A US naval ship eventually arrived and persuaded the Japanese to release the survivors, but there was outrage in the American press at their treatment.

America's response to the *Lagoda* incident and the snubbing of Commodore Biddle not only transformed relations between Japan and the West forever, but would eventually destabilize the long-established order in East Asia, with cataclysmic consequences that still reverberate today.

In July 1853, seeking to sort out the Japan problem once and for all, Commodore Perry's fleet of four heavily armed ships sailed into Kurihama Bay on the Pacific coast of Japan. Japan was believed to be rich in minerals, particularly gold and copper, but also, vitally for the new steam-powered ships, it had coal.

I am here now, on the waterfront at Kurihama where Perry's sailors first landed, staring out at the sea, trying to think big thoughts about nations and cultures, colonial legacies and the sands of time, but the modern world is conspiring against me. There is the young family trying their best to make the most of their out-of-season trip to the beach, digging doggedly in the chilly wet sand a few feet away; there is the "Fuck the Police" graffiti (quite unusual in Japan) on a fisherman's hut over to my right; and blotting the horizon are a cement works and electricity towers. None of these is helping conjure the epochal moment when Perry sailed into this modest bay south of Tokyo and changed the world.

I turn away and walk across the road to a small park. There in the middle of the park is a large, gray rock, like one of Obelix's menhirs, on a plinth with vertical white Japanese text on one side, and on the other, an English translation in an (I suppose) rather apt "Wild West"-style font:

THIS MONUMENT
COMMEMORATES
THE FIRST ARRIVAL
OF
COMMODORE PERRY,
AMBASSADOR FROM THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
WHO LANDED AT THIS PLACE
JULY 14, 1853.

A nearby plaque expands further:

ON JULY 8*, 1853, COMMODORE MATTHEW GALBRAITH PERRY, USN,
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, THE UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES EAST
INDIA, CHINA AND JAPAN SEAS, WHO ANCHORED OFFING OF URAGA,
LANDED HERE AT KURIHAMA BEACH AND DELIVERED THE LETTER OF
PRESIDENT FILMORE [SIC] TO THE THEN JAPANESE GOVERNMENT. NEXT
YEAR, THE US JAPAN TREATY OF PEACE AND AMITY HAD BEEN
CONCLUDED AT KANAGAWA. SUCH SERIES OF EVENTS BECAME MOTIVE

POWER TO BRING BACK JAPAN, WHO UNILATERALLY SHUT ITS DIPLOMATIC
DOOR TO OTHER COUNTRIES BY THE THEN JAPANESE GOVERNMENT, TO
THE WORLD.

(*PERRY HAD TO WAIT A LITTLE BEFORE COMING ASHORE).

I have come to Kurihama because I am looking for a place to start my journey, somewhere with historical resonance, and to me, at least at this stage of my trip around the region, the moment when the Americans muscled their way into Japan seems the most resonant of them all.

When Perry sailed into Kurihama, he inadvertently set off a chain of events that would result in the complete inversion of the Confucian geopolitical hierarchy that had held in the region for most of the last two millennia. China had been the Middle Kingdom, font of all knowledge, technology, and civilization; Korea was the primary tributary land, the middle sibling, and Japan the vaguely barbaric little brother, but the trauma of the Black Ships' arrival lit the fuse for a quasi-revolution in Japan. What followed was rapid modernization and militarization of Japan, leading ultimately to a catastrophic attempt to build an empire based on the Western model.

The arrival of the Black Ships was the nineteenth-century equivalent of one of those alien invasion movies in which colossal spacecraft blot out the sun. Perry's squadron weighed anchor with "guns placed in position and shotted, the ammunition arranged, the small arms made ready, sentinels and men at their posts, and, in short, all the preparations made, usual before meeting an enemy." The Japanese were shaken to their foundations by the towering ships, up to forty times the size of Japanese vessels, belching diabolical smoke with cannons bristling on their flanks. With their outdated matchlocks and spears, they could only stand impotently by as Perry delivered what he described as a "manly, yet respectful" letter from the thirteenth president of the United States to the emperor of Japan.¹

The Japanese had been warned by the Dutch that the Americans were on their way and, via a mixture of French, Dutch, and Chinese, quickly informed Perry that he must leave, or at least go to Nagasaki at the far southwestern end of the country, a safe distance from Edo (Tokyo), where

they had bureaucrats in place for negotiating with foreigners. Perry refused. He was prepared to wait. Talks continued about how and where the president's letter would be handed over and a response given from the emperor.

Almost a week later, following many bottles of brandy shared with the Japanese functionaries on board the *Susquehanna* (Perry notes that the Japanese's "studied politeness" was employed as much between themselves as with their visitors), they had finally worked out the details of the negotiation, right down to whether the commodore would present the letter with his own hand to the Japanese commissioner; and, amid great ceremony, Perry, two hundred sailors, plus a marching band landed on the beach here in Kurihama and delivered the president's letter to a Japanese official judged to be of equal standing to a commodore of the United States Navy.

To the accompanying letter, Perry added a threatening little postscript for the emperor:

Many of the largest ships-of-war destined to visit Japan have not yet arrived in these seas, though they are hourly expected; and the undersigned, as an evidence of his friendly intentions, has brought but four of the smaller ones, designing, should it become necessary, to return to Yedo [Edo] in the ensuing spring with a much larger force.

Having wintered in Okinawa, Perry returned to Kurihama in February 1854 to receive his answer from the emperor. He came with eight ships this time, and was rewarded with the greatest prize in international relations: a letter from the emperor promising "we shall entirely comply with the proposals of your government."

The Japanese were all too aware of the fate that had befallen the Chinese at the hands of the English navy, resulting in the loss of Hong Kong in 1842, and capitulated, giving US ships permission to begin to visit Shimoda (south of Tokyo) and Hakodate, in Hokkaido, and for a US consul to take up residence in both ports. Shipwrecked sailors would be treated

hospitably and American ships would be allowed to buy supplies. On March 31, 1854, Perry signed the Treaty of Kanagawa to this effect, celebrated on shore with a show of strength by sumo wrestlers (“twenty-five masses of fat,” according to Perry), a gift of hundreds of sacks of rice from the Japanese, a minstrel performance by the American sailors, and the aforementioned miniature steam locomotive.

As Perry later wrote, “The vigorous grasp of the hand of America, which was proffered in a friendly spirit, but thrust forward with an energy that proved the power to strike, as well as the disposition to embrace, had stirred Japanese isolation into a sensibility of its relationship to the rest of the world.”

Japan was indeed opened, but it was also humiliated; its sense of itself had been thoroughly undermined and its short-term future plunged into uncertainty. The Tokugawa government had caved at the merest hint of military threat, but Perry’s initial treaty was just the start. In 1858 another treaty permitted the Americans to set up consulates in several Japanese ports with their own jurisdiction under US law; to set trade terms favorable to the Americans; and to worship as Christians on Japanese soil, the first time this had been allowed in three centuries. Within several years, the English, French, Dutch, and Russians had also signed similar “unequal treaties” imposing their terms on Japan, with Yokohama emerging as the largest center for foreign trade.

The foreigners’ extraterritoriality, meaning that they were not subject to Japanese law or its courts, would lead to various abuses and conflicts. As the British diplomat C. Pemberton Hodgson wrote of Japan in the 1860s: “Insults, threats, words of doubtful celebrity, met the quiet and wonder-struck Japanese as often as they endeavored to pacify their indignant guests.” Japan was traumatized and divided by the arrival of the barbarian foreigners. One faction advocated the violent removal of this alien presence, and there were several attacks on foreigners in the early 1860s. In 1862, in Yokohama, samurai of the Satsuma clan (a notoriously fighty bunch from Kyushu) killed a British merchant, C. L. Richardson, when he refused to dismount his horse and show them due respect. In retaliation, the

British bombarded Kagoshima, at the heart of the Satsumas' territory in far southwestern Japan, forcing them to pay compensation.

The Satsuma formed an alliance with the Choshu clan (from today's Yamaguchi, the home prefecture of current prime minister Abe Shinzo),² and rose up against the Tokugawa shogunate in the name of the emperor. The ensuing revolution sought to restore the emperor from his centuries-old position as a powerless ceremonial figure to a central role in the modernizing elite, with Shinto, the ancient, indigenous religion, as the nation's guiding belief system.

The Meiji Restoration, as the revolution was later known, came about with relatively little blood spilled, thanks to a turn of events that saw both the ruling shogun, Iemochi, and the emperor, Komei, die within the same year, 1866. Iemochi's successor, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last shogun, ruled for just one year. The alliance rid Japan of the samurai class and restored the emperor to the head of what would become a highly militarized, industrialized, modern Japan. Initially, the victors had an idea to return Japan to its state of seclusion, epitomized by the slogan "Revere the emperor, expel the barbarians," but they soon realized that the best strategy would be to absorb the new technologies of the West. As the Charter Oath read at the enthronement of Emperor Meiji put it: "Knowledge shall be sought all over the world, and thereby the foundations of imperial rule shall be strengthened."

The foreigners were allowed to remain, and fifty Japanese officials and fifty-nine students embarked on a two-year mission to Europe and the United States to learn the secrets of the Western imperialists. Dozens of Western engineers were invited to Japan to help with the process of *bunmei kaika*, or "civilization and enlightenment," embodying another motto of the era, *wakon yosai*: "Japanese spirit/Western technology." Japan rejected Asia and turned toward the West. It has never really looked back.

The emperor's seat was moved from Kyoto to Edo, which was renamed Tokyo. Japan was divided into prefectures to be run by government-appointed governors. With the founding of a national conscript army, the samurai were forced to get jobs, or not, as was the case for many who died in poverty. And for all the revolutionaries' bluster about ridding Japan of

the evil foreigners, within a decade of Perry's arrival, the Japanese had begun to dress like Westerners, in starched collars, top hats, and tails; to eat curry and schnitzel; to trade at Western-style banks; and learn how to make whiskey and play golf. Above all, the Japanese learned that to be a modern nation, to be respected on the global stage, meant becoming an expansionist colonial power.

By 1876 Japan was able to do to its neighbor Korea precisely what America had done to it two decades earlier—open up the country and impose unequal treaties. More astonishing still, by April 1895 the Japanese army had defeated the Chinese Qing army in the first Sino-Japanese War, fought to decide who would “protect” Korea. In the ensuing Treaty of Shimonoseki, China was forced to hand over control of Taiwan to Japan. And in 1905 Japan became the first non-Western power to defeat a Western power, Russia, following a conflict over present-day North Korea.

In 1910, encouraged by this military success, Japan annexed all of Korea, partly as a buffer against Russia, partly to secure food supplies and raw materials for the rapidly expanding Japanese population, and partly to give the recently redundant samurai class something to do. Over the ensuing years, the Japanese army would move into northeastern China, and then south to Hong Kong, Singapore, and beyond. They would not leave until 1945.

At the Tokyo war crimes trials in 1946, General Ishiwara Kanji, who had been in charge of the Japanese invasion of China in 1931, referred specifically to Commodore Perry when questioned on his nation's military expansionism.

“Haven't you heard of Perry?” he asked his American interrogators. “[Japan] took your country as its teacher and set about learning how to be aggressive.”

My frustrations about the lack of historic atmosphere here at Kurihama don't really matter, of course, not least because my original hypothesis—that America was the root of all East Asia's problems—would later turn out to be fatally flawed. I give up on my attempts to conjure sweeping evocations of history, and head for the small local history museum in the

corner of Perry Park, interrupting two boys playing baseball as I cross the gravel.

Inside the museum are fascinating Japanese depictions of Perry's ships made at the time, their exaggerated scale giving a sense of the artists' dumbstruck awe, along with Hogarthian caricatures of the commodore, with his massive gold epaulettes like wings, and his crew, with huge noses.

I look at a model of the ships in the bay and imagine the fearful prospect they would have presented; the two massive, triple-masted steamers in particular must have seemed quite unearthly. Earlier that afternoon, on my drive down the coast from Tokyo to Kurihama, I had stopped off in Yokosuka, Japan's biggest naval base, headquarters both to the largest overseas American naval installation in the world, the Seventh Fleet (what would Perry have made of *that?*), and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force, their navy by another name. Though obviously no threat to me, I had still experienced a stomach-churning frisson standing beside the massive gray bulk of the destroyers. There is nothing like viewing a ship of war up close to give you the willies.

I leave the museum and head back to my car. Kurihama is a rather straggly, workaday kind of town, with a small fishing harbor and a light industry area and a quiet pedestrian high street. I notice that some of the paving stones are embossed with a profile of one of Perry's ships, with the distinctive steam paddle on the side. These days, Kurihama's history is cherished by the town, it seems; they even have a Perry Festival every July.

My plan is to drive west through Japan and beyond, but first, I am going to retrace my steps a little, back up the coast to Yokohama, to explore a rather more contemporary social and political issue that has its roots in the country's ambitious Meiji-era colonial expansion.

YOKOHAMA

I am standing waiting to cross the road close to Yokohama Stadium as the convoy of one white and five black minivans passes by. Flags flutter from the sides of the vans and red police lights flash from their roofs, but this is not an official parade. I catch a glimpse of a driver's white cotton gloves, incongruously genteel alongside the tirade blaring from the vans' loudspeakers, so loud it is drowning out the cheers of the crowds watching the baseball game inside the stadium on this sunny Saturday afternoon. None of the other pedestrians around me seem to pay the noise any heed, though.

I don't know what exactly is blaring from the speakers—it is usually something along the lines of “Koreans are vermin” or “Koreans must die,” that kind of thing—but I do know these are members of one of Japan's many ultra-nationalist groups. One giveaway is that two of the vans fly Rising Sun flags, the one with red rays radiating from a central sun on a white background. Once the symbol of Japanese military imperialism, these days the Kyokujitsu-ki is often flown by those with, let's say, a misguided sense of patriotism, and it is especially provocative for the Koreans and the Chinese (the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force ships also fly it, which as you can imagine causes problems when they take part in joint events with the Korean navy).

The name of this particular group is displayed on the side of their vehicles. It translates to “Make wind,” a reference not to flatulence but to the *kamikaze*, the mythological divine wind which supposedly twice saved Japan from invasion by the Mongols in the thirteenth century and was adopted as the name for their suicide pilots during World War II. The vans bear messages asserting that the Japanese constitution is that of an “occupied country,” which they would like to “blow away,” and another referring to the Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute.

I first encountered these convoys in Japan many years ago. I assumed they were mainstream political parties campaigning until, finally, I asked some passersby, and they rolled their eyes and dismissed them as “crazies.” This would turn out to be the unanimous verdict of every single Japanese person I discussed them with thereafter, but they are noisy, high-profile crazies; persistent crazies, thugs and racists who cause a great deal of upset to immigrant communities. (I was later told by someone who once traveled inside one of the vans that the messages they blare are prerecorded and the passengers pass the time watching cooking shows on TV, but this hardly diminishes their impact in the public arena.)

My encounter with the ultra-nationalists is particularly unfortunate, as I have come to Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo, Japan’s second largest city in terms of population, in search of what I hoped would be a positive story about the country’s largest ethnic minority, the Chinese. There are 730,000 Chinese with legal resident status living in Japan today, although the actual Chinese population is estimated at more than one million. Yokohama’s Chinatown is the biggest in Asia, with more than three hundred shops and restaurants. It is the number one tourist attraction in the city, and it is especially packed today, as there is an annual festival taking place.

I enter through a massive, ornate *paifang* (gateway) decorated with golden dragons and green tiles, but it is soon obvious that Yokohama’s Chinatown is very much a Japanese version of China. At one point I pass a large fiberglass Hello Kitty dressed in a panda suit—a touching symbol of Sino-Japanese accord, I tell myself. Souvenir shops sell plastic battery-powered pandas (which for some reason dance the lambada), and the food is “international Chinese” rather than anything authentically regional.

Everything is nice and neat and tidy, just like the rest of Japan, although when I mentioned I was coming here some Japanese had wrinkled their noses and warned me that it would be smellier and dirtier than “normal” Japan.

The queues for all the restaurants in Chinatown are impossibly long today, but that doesn’t matter. I have alternative Sino-Japanese lunch plans over on the other side of Yokohama.

★ ★ ★

I pause, chopsticks poised twixt bowl and mouth. This is the most delicious bowl of noodles I have ever tasted, a genuine goose-bump bowl. But wait, Michael. Not so hasty. Calm yourself. Remember your ramen golden rule: “The true test is how you feel beyond the halfway mark.” Every bowl of ramen tastes good to start with, but in my heart I already know this bowl from Rishiri Ramen Miraku, an outpost of a restaurant on a remote island off the northern coast of Hokkaido, is the single greatest noodle soup I will ever taste. Slurp, slurp, ponder, slurp. Already feeling wistful that it is nearly over. Slurp, tilt bowl, scoop the last spoonful. Deep sigh.

I am in Yokohama’s Raumen Museum (*raumen* is a common alternative spelling of “ramen”), more a food theme park than a museum, decorated in a Shōwa-era style to look like Tokyo in 1958. I have arranged to meet the museum’s PR director, Nakano Masahiro, because I want to find out more about the Chinese origins of ramen, in particular how the Japanese regard the roots of what is arguably their most popular dish. The story has a familiar beginning; it is how so many stories about modern Japan begin.

“Up until the 1850s Japan was a closed country,” says Nakano. “But China had been trading with Europe and America for a long time, so in China they had plenty of people who could speak English, French, and so on. After Japan opened, Chinese people came to work as translators for the Europeans and Americans who started to come here, the special Japanese ports where foreigners were allowed, like Yokohama.” By 1899 the Westerners had all but left Yokohama for nearby Tokyo, but the Chinese remained, their community having grown over the years to around five

thousand people. They had set up businesses, initially restricted to three fields: catering (with cooks from Canton), hairdressing, and textiles.

“There was some distrust of the Chinese in Yokohama, but they were good business partners,” says Nakano, and the one place where the two business communities were always able to gather was around that great unifier, the dinner table. “The Chinese found Japanese food difficult to eat, especially all the raw vegetables and raw fish, so they started their own restaurants. The Japanese were curious about Chinese food, particularly because they only really ate chicken, not beef and pork like the Chinese.”

In those early years, Chinese restaurants were considered rather posh; it wasn’t until the early twentieth century that they began to move downmarket. One of these early Chinese culinary imports would become the origins of ramen, which was initially sold here in Yokohama in the 1890s as “Nanking soba.”

Ramen, the most iconic of twentieth-century Japanese dishes, started off Chinese but morphed into something distinctly local with the addition of soy sauce and, later, dashi, the Japanese stock made primarily from dried seaweed. Usually, the Chinese make a generic broth that is then used as the base of many dishes, but with ramen, the broth is specific to the dish. “Japanese people think of it as Japanese, but realize that it has Chinese roots, and many Chinese think it is wholly Japanese,” says Nakano.

The Americans also had a hand in ramen’s rise. After World War II, they led the Allied occupation until 1952 and flooded the Japanese market with cheap wheat, of which they had a surplus. As several recent histories of the dish have explained, this fueled the ramen boom, as ramen uses wheat-flour noodles.

Yokohama’s Chinatown was also a playground for the US military stationed in the area—today it is still home to quite a few jazz clubs and American-style bars from that era. But the district really began to boom after 1972, when Nixon’s ping-pong diplomacy in China sent the Japanese government into a panic. They realized that they too had to start building bridges with the Chinese, so Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei hastened to Nanjing to shake hands with Mao Zedong. As happened in the States, this kick-started a mini-craze in all things Chinese among the Japanese, and

Yokohama Chinatown took off, gradually transforming into, as one local explained it to me, “A lovable, cartoony version of China, like Disneyland gives you of America.”

As I left the Raumen Museum and headed off for another appointment on the other side of the city, this all seemed to me to be a hopeful omen for the ability of different nationalities to cooperate and find common ground outside the knotty issues of history and politics. But what happens when the rift is *within* one of those immigrant communities?

KOTOBUKI

“If you just peer round the corner inside that door you can see them, but best not to let them see you looking,” Professor Tom Gill, my guide to the seamier side of Yokohama, whispers as we loiter on the sidewalk. Looking left to make sure we aren’t being observed, he gestures to our right that I should take a look through a beaded curtain in a doorway just ahead. Outside the door is a glossy black 1970s Mercedes convertible, quite out of place in this shabby part of town. I sneak a look through the door as I pass by, affecting nonchalance. Inside, a handful of men are gathered around a card table. They are yakuza, Tom says. It is an illicit gambling den.

This is obviously an awfully exciting turn of events, as far as I am concerned, but Tom, a social anthropologist wearing an argyle sweater, glasses perched absentmindedly on his forehead, has seen it all before. Tom, in his late fifties, is a long-term resident of the city, and has spent twenty-six years in Japan. He is a lecturer at Yokohama’s Meiji Gakuin University and an expert on Kotobuki, the name for the district we are exploring. Though adjacent to Chinatown, Kotobuki is of a very different nature. Tourists don’t come here unless they are very, very lost.

As well as the yakuza, Kotobuki is home to a couple of thousand of the city’s day laborers. There are versions of this Japanese skid row in several major cities, but Yokohama’s is perhaps the best known, and it also serves

as a kind of unofficial Koreatown, as most of the flophouses, or *doya-gai*, here are owned, and in part occupied, by people of Korean descent.



In Japan, resident Koreans are called Zainichi. This literally translates as “foreign resident of Japan.” In theory the word can apply to any foreigner, but in reality it strongly implies someone who is descended from pre-1945 Korean immigrants, a legacy of Japan’s annexation of Korea between 1910 and 1945. During this time, hundreds of thousands of Koreans were encouraged to move to Japan to work in mining, munitions manufacturing, and farming, among other sectors, but as Japan’s military ambitions gathered pace, many were also forcibly brought here, or tricked into coming, to replace the Japanese men who were sent off to fight. By the end of World War II, around 2.3 million Koreans, most of them originally from what is today South Korea, were living in Japan, but with the economy almost entirely destroyed, there were few opportunities for work, and the majority repatriated within a couple of years. Most of the six hundred thousand or so who remained had come voluntarily during the earlier part of Japan’s colonial rule and built lives in Japan over several decades. When Korea was plunged into the civil war of 1950–53, which was followed by widespread poverty, at times starvation, and then brutal dictatorships in both North and South, it made the Koreans in Japan even less inclined to “go back.”

Today, there are roughly half a million Zainichi in Japan, although as we will see, defining who they are and how they identify themselves is complex, a reflection of the tumultuous times they lived through after the war. The Zainichi faced heavy discrimination in the postwar employment market. Public sector jobs were closed to them because you needed to be a Japanese citizen to work for the government. The moment the Japanese regained control of their own country in 1952, when the Treaty of San Francisco formally ended the Allied occupation of Japan, the Zainichi were placed in a stateless limbo that endured for many years, affecting their rights in terms of healthcare, travel, and job opportunities, despite the fact that they had contributed both to Japan’s war efforts and its reconstruction.

When it did finally become possible to apply for Japanese citizenship, the process was long and costly, which in itself excluded many. It was only when diplomatic relations were restored with South Korea in 1965 that the Zainichi were given the chance to apply for South Korean passports, and many did. Later, they were able to apply for “extra-special permanent residence status” in Japan.

Even so, many Japanese companies still did not want to employ Koreans, and many gravitated to the employment of the American-led occupiers. There was plenty of that kind of work for the Koreans in Yokohama’s docks, unloading the vast quantities of emergency food supplies that flooded into Japan on US ships in the immediate postwar years, and later during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, which were hugely prosperous for the Japanese.

As soon as Professor Gill and I enter the first of its four blocks, it is obvious that something is different about Kotobuki: there are piles of trash on the side of the road, and the buildings are notably grubbier, with stained concrete and rusty windows. Chinatown was colorful, full of life, clearly a place for leisure. Kotobuki was monochromatic, not a little bleak. On one corner, a couple dozen rather disheveled-looking men sit on the curbside with beer cans at their feet. These are the day laborers.

“The Korean community in Yokohama never had the cash cow of a Chinatown,” Tom tells me as we adjourn to a dingy café-bar. Two men in overalls sitting at the bar drinking draft beers regard us suspiciously for a moment, then return their gaze to the TV on top of the fridge, which is showing a talent show. “All they’ve had is this slum district, which most [Japanese] people don’t even know is Korean, and if they did, they would use it as just another [misguided] example of how ‘slummy’ and ‘smelly’ Koreans are.”

This prejudice persists even though people of Zainichi heritage have achieved prominence and success in most areas of Japanese society. The richest man in Japan, Son Masayoshi, founder of telecommunications giant SoftBank, is descended from Koreans who came to Japan before WWII; he has even reverted to using his Korean family name. But still the image many Japanese have of the Zainichi today—not just the day laborers, but all

Koreans—is of a lower-class people who make pungent food, have different traditions than the Japanese, and work in unskilled or even criminal occupations. Koreans supposedly run all the *pachinko* parlors¹ and *yakiniku* restaurants (derived from Korean barbecue), or work in illicit gambling (mostly mah-jongg)—the kind of derogatory stereotypes that the black van protesters exploit to generate anti-Korean feeling in Japan.

The Zainichi are now in their fourth or fifth generation and their numbers are slowly declining. Around ten thousand take up Japanese citizenship each year, often adopting Japanese names. In this they are helped by the curious situation in Japan whereby even Japanese people can have an everyday name as well as a completely different official, formal name that they don't use. There are many options for Zainichi regarding the name they use: often they will use their Korean name informally but maintain a legal alias—a Japanese name for official use. “Most people would agree that having a Korean name is still going to be a minus point on your CV when you are looking for a job,” says Tom. In the past it has been difficult for Zainichi to rent property, and despite the very positive reputation Korean men have among many Japanese women, thanks to the popularity of Korean romance series airing on Japanese TV, Korean heritage is still sometimes seen as a negative when it comes to dating and marriage.

It is a major taboo to ask someone if they are of Korean descent, so sometimes the Japanese resort to other means to determine heritage. I tell Tom about a Japanese friend of mine who told me that his fiancé's parents, suspecting he might have Korean heritage, hired private detectives to check out his background. Tom thinks this kind of thing is illegal now but adds that it is still an issue in more traditional families. Nonetheless, many ethnic Korean Japanese residents have married Japanese people and have mixed-race-children—by some estimates over a million.

Sociologist Fukuoka Yasunori has defined five categories of Koreans in Japan. First there are those who identify with South Korea who are called Mindan and might even have dual Japanese–South Korean nationality—officially illegal, but rarely prosecuted. Most remarkable from a foreign perspective is the second group—die-hard North Korean sympathizers who

hope and believe that, one day, they will return to live in a reunified Korea run by the Kim dynasty in Pyongyang. They are called Chongryon or Chongreon. For obvious reasons, their number has declined in recent years, but there was a time, back in the 1960s and '70s, when this wasn't such an absurd position to take, as North Korea still held some appeal economically and ideologically. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those Koreans who reject their ethnicity and have changed their names to blend in; they might not speak Korean and have naturalized and received Japanese passports. In many cases, their friends and colleagues don't even know they have a Korean background. There are also those who are proud of their Korean heritage, not least since the Korean cultural wave—*hallyu*—made it properly cool to be Korean, but they don't consider themselves particularly Korean, don't affiliate with either North or South, certainly don't want to move to Korea, and often don't even speak Korean. Finally, there are those who don't care either way and just want to get on with their lives without having to identify as anything.

Most fascinating to me of course are those who identify themselves as North Korean. There are an estimated 35,000 or so Korean residents of Japan who continue to refuse to get either a South Korean or Japanese passport because their sympathies lie with the Great Leader Kim and his regime, and it is quite likely that a number of Koreans who have reluctantly accepted the exigencies of those passports also still identify with the North Koreans. They long for the day when its totalitarian dictatorship finally triumphs, and the pure race of the “true” Korea reunifies the peninsula. All the while the North Korean regime has been firing long-range missiles in the direction of their temporary adopted home.

Even more extraordinary is the fact that it is these North Korean sympathizers who run most of the sixty to seventy Korean schools that remain operational in Japan, and teach a broadly North Korean doctrine. There used to be many more, but a large number have amalgamated or closed over the past twenty years. Some of these Chongryon schools are funded directly by Pyongyang, and some even receive Japanese state funding via their local prefectures. This is because up until the 1980s, many Japanese politicians, particularly from the Communist and Socialist parties,

fostered good relations with the Chongryon leadership. Mindan, or South Korea-oriented, parents often send their children to these schools too because they want them to learn the Korean language and to know Korean culture. Their options are either to send their children to North Korean schools or to abandon their cultural and ethnic heritage completely. When you realize that the suppression of Korean culture and language was a policy of the Japanese when they occupied Korea, you can understand why these parents might be reluctant to let that happen. “Imagine, for decades you have seen the Japanese try to destroy your culture and national identity—they made the population speak Japanese, take Japanese names, put up Shinto shrines all over the place,” says Tom. Particularly in the latter stages of their occupation, the Japanese did all they could to turn Koreans into Japanese citizens. They even referred to them not as Koreans but as “external Japanese.”

As for the South Koreans, they seem to be ambivalent about the plight of the Zainichi. In a 2018 poll only 7.8 percent cited discrimination of South Koreans living in Japan as the reason they had a “bad impression” of the Japanese. Far more pressing were issues such as the sovereignty of the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands. Meanwhile, Japanese right-wing groups complain that their special permanent residence status gives the Zainichi undue privileges. If a Korean resident commits a crime, it will be one of his aliases that appears in the newspaper, not his real name, they complain. It also irritates them that the Zainichi are allowed to enter immigration through the same line as Japanese people. In truth, the Japanese ultra-nationalists are probably just using the special resident status as a convenient stick with which to bash the Zainichi. What really gets their goat is the ongoing criticism of Japan’s colonial past in South Korea—by South Korean politicians, protestors, on TV, in movies, and in particular the still widespread anti-Japanese teaching in their schools, plus of course the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands dispute.

One of the more prominent anti-Korean right-wing groups of recent times has been the Zaitokukai (its full name translates as something like “Citizen’s Association Against the Privileges of Old-Comer Korean Japanese”). It began around 2007, starting online before moving to street

protests in Osaka and Tokyo, usually in areas with large Korean populations.

The slogans they have chanted outside Korean schools and residential areas (as reported in the *Japan Times*) include “Kick Koreans out of Japan,” “Push criminal Koreans into Tokyo Bay,” “Come out, Koreans who are listening there. Come on out so we can beat you to death. Don’t fool Japanese, you cockroaches,” “Come on out if you guys have pride as North Koreans. You come forward so you can get tormented to death for the sake of Kim Jong-il. Come on out so we can kill you.”

As a result of this kind of thing, in 2014 the US State Department, in its country report on Japan, accused the country of “entrenched societal discrimination” against its immigrant populations. Following further pressure from the United Nations Human Rights Committee, Japan did eventually pass an anti-hate speech law against physical threats to people, but the law doesn’t actually ban hate speech in person or online and carries no penalties for the guilty.

In Tokyo, the Korean community has traditionally been centered on Shinjuku, a small district in the shadow of Shinjuku. I go there the day after my visit with Tom Gill and spend an enjoyable afternoon wandering the streets around the station, which are packed with Korean restaurants. I have come to meet journalist Yasuda Koichi. I want to get a little perspective on the noisy black minivan-ers who seem such an anomaly in decorous, reserved, contemporary Japan. Yasuda was there at their genesis.

“There have always been racists here in Japan, but if you didn’t look for them, you wouldn’t have noticed them,” says Yasuda, in his early fifties and with the slightly exhausted appearance typical of a news reporter. “But this was a new group emerging. You were seeing mothers, normal office workers, pensioners, saying that we were better off without foreigners. They have this excessive sense of loss, that many things have been taken away from them by foreigners and foreign countries.”

When the online commenters moved out onto the streets of Japan in 2007, they were led by a man who called himself Sakurai Makoto—his real name is Takata Makoto—from Fukuoka. Yasuda did some digging on him.

“I spoke to people who went to high school with him, but they just said he was very quiet, very low-profile. Most didn’t even remember him.”

Takata moved to Tokyo, got a job as a security guard, and somehow managed to gather a sizable online following for his racist rants and blog posts. “He started to engage with Koreans about the territorial issues and historical issues. He became a hero online, a charismatic patriot.”

In truth, Japan’s annual immigration figures are relatively small. In 2018 the country accepted 42 asylum seekers out of 10,493 applications; typically, fewer than 10,000 applications for citizenship are approved each year. The total foreign resident population is currently 2 percent, compared to around 14 percent in the UK, but that is rising at a record rate. Ironically these record increases have been overseen by Abe Shinzo. What’s more, this right-winger is aiming to bring in a half million more short-term, unskilled immigrants to Japan by 2025 to help with shortfalls in elder-care, farming, and construction.

Still, in 2007 followers of the organization Takata founded, Zaitokukai (meaning “Association of Citizens Against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi”), took to the streets in increasing numbers, beginning in Japan’s largest Korean quarter, Tsuruhashi in Osaka, and later here in Shinjuku in Tokyo. Yasuda was quick to pick up on the movement, but couldn’t place articles about it anywhere in the mainstream Japanese media. “Editors told me that it was a marginal movement, they didn’t need to cover it. Kind of ‘Ignore them, they will go away,’” he tells me. “There was also a sense of ‘Don’t give them any publicity.’” But he felt they posed a genuine danger precisely because of their broad demographic. “If it was a group of skinheads, then you could have disregarded them.”

A visit by the South Korean prime minister to the disputed Takeshima/Dokdo Islands in 2012 was the catalyst for an explosion in the number of anti-Korean marchers. As the demonstrations outside Korean schools grew to gatherings of up to a thousand people, it became impossible for the mainstream media and authorities to ignore them.

The Tokyo authorities eventually cracked down on the demonstrations, but by then locals had already mobilized in opposition. “When Zaitokukai organized with seven hundred people, more than a thousand came to

counter them, and, just like the Zaikokukai, they were a whole spectrum of people, regular people, not unionists or communists, but salarymen, musicians, office workers,” Yasuda says.

Why did the right wing protest so much against South Korea? Surely North Korea and China posed far greater military, economic, and diplomatic threats to Japan.

“I did asked a member of Zaitokukai this, and he said that it was because they had more information about South Korea. China and North Korea are further away physically but also in terms of information. Whatever is reported in the South Korean media is also reported here. The racists in Japan hear about the Korean education system [which can be virulently anti-Japanese], they know a lot about how the average South Korean thinks about Japan. They are an easy target.”

It was all very depressing, but Yasuda-san did have some good news. He claims that the Zaitokukai were on the wane.

“The number of demonstrations is down. Their activity is slowing to nil.”

Hooray!

Not so fast.

“It’s not because we have less racism or discrimination in Japan. The reason is, Japanese society as a whole has embraced their ideas. It used to be just them saying, ‘Go home, Koreans’—now I hear that kind of thing from people around me. And look at the Japanese government. It’s just a diluted version of Zaitokukai. Mr. Abe doesn’t make crude remarks like they do—he is quite sophisticated—but his government believes that the prewar militarism of Japan was correct, and there are so many in the local assemblies making the same kind of assertions.”

Another prominent right-wing group is Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference), founded in 1997. They are rather more sophisticated in their rhetoric than the black vanners: one expert described them to me as “a blue blood, upper-crust elite made up of effete reactionaries.” They fear China, want to revive the Meiji Restorationists’ emperor-centric view of Japan, amend the constitution so that Japan can militarize, and erase anything unpleasant about the colonial past from Japanese history textbooks. They

thoroughly endorse prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni shrine to pay respects to the war dead enshrined there, including war criminals. Indeed, among their membership are many descendants of those who prosecuted the war in the 1930s, most prominently Prime Minister Abe himself (his grandfather was a high-ranking official in the wartime government), as well as a large number of members of the Diet, Japan's legislature.

Yasuda draws a direct line between modern-day right-wing racism and the country's imperial past. "Japanese people have always considered the Korean Peninsula as our enemy. Ninety years ago, after the Great Kanto Earthquake here in Tokyo, many Koreans were killed by locals.² We have always looked down on them as a violent people, barbaric people. I can remember my grandparents saying we should always be wary about Koreans. Discrimination: That is their history."

Social media has also changed the landscape, of course, simultaneously isolating and connecting people with extremist views. "These people have found what they think is the truth online. For them, the media is the enemy. Whoever screams loudest and longest gets the people's attention."

And yet Yasuda still has hope for the Japanese people. "I hate the way it is in Japan today, but I believe in society, I believe that people have the power to change this trash society because it was ordinary people who stopped the demonstrations in Shin Okubo. Today, you can't conduct that kind of demonstration here unscathed. They are mocked. There is a counterattack. Democracy has always been precarious, but I have a marginal hope, very marginal, but I hope."

EBISU

You would think that the decades of attacks and vitriol from the Japanese right wing would have generated a strong sense of solidarity among the two main Zainichi factions, the Mindan, who affiliate with South Korea, and the Chongryon, those who still hold a flame for the North. But not a bit of it.

In the 1980s, for instance, there was an attempt to turn Kotobuki into a Koreatown to rival the neighboring Chinatown, but neither group could agree on the plan, despite the fact that it would have been a surefire economic winner with its location in prime real estate close to Chinatown and Tokyo's baseball stadium. The idea was to knock down all the flophouses, sell off half the land for redevelopment in the form of offices and hotels, and use the rest for Korean barbecue restaurants, soju bars, and an off-track betting center for horse- and power-boat racing. Yokohama's Koreatown would have been perfectly placed to cash in on the boom in Korean culture that swept through Japan in the late 1990s and early 2000s, anthropologist Tom Gill told me, "but the two groups essentially hated each other's guts." The discussion dragged on for years, until the economic crash rendered further discussion moot.

The mutual hatred between Chongryon and Mindan rumbles on to this day. A couple of years ago, a Chongryon school won a notable court case against one of the ultra-nationalist groups, which had been inciting racial

hatred outside the gates of one of their schools, terrorizing children and staff. But did the local Mindan newspaper report on their success against the hate-mongers in the Japanese courts? They did not mention a word of it. And when the Mindan community was successful in a campaign to stop a fingerprinting identification system—which they felt was discriminatory—the Chongryons would have nothing to do with it, as they considered themselves to be merely temporary residents of Japan anyway, inconveniently stranded until the glorious day when they would return to the worker’s paradise of North Korea.

Some Chongryon could not wait for that improbable event to come to pass. They had tired of the relentless prejudice and restrictions on them as Zainichi people in Japan, so they went and made the move to North Korea regardless.

In 1959 Kim Il-sung made a famous speech encouraging Zainichi to “return to the socialist fatherland,” and from then until the early 1980s the Chongryon leadership in Japan (in the absence of official diplomatic ties between the two countries, their headquarters in Tokyo was the de facto North Korean embassy) managed to persuade almost one hundred thousand Zainichi to move to North Korea. They did this with the full cooperation of the Japanese Red Cross; most of the émigrés sailed from the northeast port of Niigata.

Some of the Zainichi who left for North Korea later realized their mistake and escaped to China; others are believed to have disappeared or been imprisoned in North Korea on suspicion of spying for Japan or South Korea. But the fate of a few of these migrants is at least now well known thanks to Yang Yong-hi, a Zainichi filmmaker based in Tokyo.

Yang’s father was born on Jeju Island, off the southwest corner of Korea, in 1927. At age fifteen, he moved to Osaka to follow his brothers in search of work, as many Koreans had done. Communism was popular among Koreans in Japan at that time, understandably given its emphasis on the very equality they lacked, and Yang’s father fell in with friends who had communist leanings. After the Korean civil war, the group naturally allied themselves with communist North Korea. This might seem an odd choice today, particularly as Yang’s father and the majority of the Zainichi were

from the South, but the newly formed Republic of Korea, to give South Korea its proper name, was poorer than the North because the North was where most of the Japanese factories and infrastructure had been built during the colonial era, and the South soon fell under the control of a nasty right-wing military dictatorship. The dictatorship in the South did not care about the plight of the Zainichi; they saw them as collaborators, hardly Korean at all, having lived in Japan for decades at that point. Park Chung-hee, the military dictator of South Korea from 1961 until his assassination in 1979, even advised the Zainichi to become Japanese citizens. In contrast, the new regime in North Korea had been founded by men who had fought against the Japanese colonialists and were now promising a fair and equal society for Koreans, free from outside influence. The North's leader, Kim Il-sung, made several more speeches directly to the Zainichi, promising them a better life, free education, free housing, jobs, and free medical care if they came "home," and for many years, North Korea's economic growth outstripped that of the South. Back then, North or South Korea was the VHS vs. Betamax of East Asian geopolitics.

"Though most of them were from the South, more than seventy percent of the Zainichi supported Chongryon at that time," Yang told me when I met her in a café in Ebisu in western Tokyo, a half-hour train ride from Yokohama.

I had learned about her family's extraordinary history through her films, the first of which, a documentary, *Dear Pyongyang*, won the Jury Special Award at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. The film was shot over ten years and explored her late father's decision, back in the 1970s, to send her three brothers from Japan, where they had been born, to be educated in North Korea. The brothers never returned, and their standard of living and health in the North declined steadily over the years. Yang was able to visit them a few times, and the footage she shot on those visits—the kind of access no foreigner ever gets in that tightly regulated country—was used in her second documentary, *Sona, the Other Myself*, which focused on the plight of her niece, Sona, growing up under a repressive dictatorship. She filmed Sona before she started at school, and afterward, charting her

transformation from innocent young girl into a child who, in order to survive, became a parrot of the Kim regime's propaganda.

The obvious question was, why on earth did Yang's parents send her brothers to North Korea in the first place? Sitting here in a hipster café in Tokyo with cold-brew coffee and matcha madeleines, it seems an unimaginable decision.

"There was a very organized return project involving the Japanese Red Cross," Yang tells me. "It was encouraged by both governments and the media. You wouldn't believe it, but even most right-wing newspapers and magazines in Japan were describing North Korea as paradise. And the Japanese government really wanted to kick out as many Zainichi as possible." The Zainichi were a diplomatic and social headache for the Japanese. "And of course the Koreans in Japan were really a noneducated people. Even my father, who became active at a high level in Chongryon, he only graduated junior high. He always talked about Kim Il-sung as a great leader, and about Marx and Lenin and those thinkers, but he never read their books, he only read the pro-Korean propaganda from Chongryon." By the 1970s Yang's father had risen to become deputy of the Osaka branch, the second-largest Chongryon group after Tokyo's.

Yang, a watchful, elegant woman whom I had assumed was in her late thirties (she is fifty-three), is well aware of the curious nature of her family's story. She explains that to properly understand what happened to the Zainichi children who were given one-way tickets to North Korea, one needs to make a conscious mental shift away from a European way of thinking to a Confucian one in which the family hierarchy and the authority of the father are inviolable. The family outranks even obvious common sense. Yang's father told his sons that they would get a better education in North Korea, a proper Korean education, for free, and that their future job opportunities would be vastly better there too, away from the prejudice the Zainichi endured in Japan. Yang only escaped being sent by dint of her gender—as a girl, her education was not considered important enough (she went on to study at universities in Tokyo and New York).

Yang believes her father meant well, but was ill-informed and, toward the end, self-deluded. She clearly loves him even though his decision turned

her mother into someone she describes as “permanently obsessed” with sending supplies from Japan. When she visited her brothers in Pyongyang, Yang would see the packages her mother had sent, stored, untouched, like sacred relics. Why didn’t their father join them there? For one thing, he had become a powerful man, more powerful in Japan than he would ever be in North Korea, but he was also holding out for reunification under the Kim regime, so that he could return to his birthplace, Jeju.

The Confucian parental pressure is one of the reasons Yang and many other Zainichi have not applied for Japanese citizenship. “If I had applied for Japanese citizenship, there would have been a big war in my family. My parents asked me not to change nationality—that’s why I had to wait until I came back from graduate school in New York in my late thirties. By then, I didn’t care about it, and even my father said I should get Japanese nationality.” This was a major moment, recorded in Yang’s film: the moment her father accepted he had been wrong about the North.

“He didn’t want to argue anymore. Toward the end of his life, he could finally see the reality. I asked him on camera if he had any regrets about sending his sons to North Korea. I thought he would say nothing, but he said very honestly, ‘I was too young. I never imagined that things would be like that.’ It caused a big problem for him with the North Korean organization in Japan because he had this very important post in Osaka.” But by that stage even her father could not deny the nature of the North Korean regime. Kim Il-sung had publicly admitted that his regime had abducted Japanese citizens from the beaches in the northeast of Japan, and the Chongryon organization had come to seem increasingly sinister.

Though her films are hardly anti-North polemics, Yang has been forbidden from ever returning to North Korea. “I have been totally blacklisted. I can’t go, I can only write to my brothers and nieces. I was worried that my family in North Korea would get into more trouble after my documentary, but so far they are okay.” Her films have been highly acclaimed and entered for international awards by the Japanese film authorities, but Yang has also experienced backlash at home in Japan.

“Of course, for Chongryon in Japan it was still very, very provocative, particularly that my father is shown expressing his regrets. Because of that,

I became enemy number one. After [the first documentary] came out, I was very worried about assassination, for me or my parents. My mother's home was attacked, stones were thrown, windows broken, and there were blackmail-type phone calls, obviously from Chongryon people saying, 'Your daughter is really a problem, we hate her, she is a traitor, how can a graduate of Korean school do this?'"

This was one of the reasons Yang turned to a fictionalized story with *Our Homeland*, which was closely based on the true story of the return of her brother Seong-ho to Japan to be treated for a brain tumor—arranged following months of behind-the-scenes negotiating by her father. Sadly, her brother had to return to North Korea before he received the treatment. He is still alive, but ailing, she tells me. *Our Homeland* was an even greater success than her documentaries, despite many warning her the film could not be made. "In the beginning I was told that no major Japanese stars would appear in it because it was so political and would mean their careers would be damaged, they would never get commercials again, but we got our first-choice actors. I had two big Japanese stars, so lots of people who knew nothing about the Zainichi came to see it, and it was written about even in fashion magazines."

Though she is too modest to mention it, *Our Homeland* cleaned up at the domestic Japanese film awards and, remarkably, given the subject matter, was selected to represent Japan in the Foreign Language category at the 2012 Academy Awards.

And what of the Chongryon Zainichi today—presumably, they are dwindling to the point of extinction? "I still have friends who send their children to Chongryon schools," Yang says. "You see, if they denied or changed their ideology, they would really have to deny their entire lives. That generation, they devoted their lives to protect that Chongryon story, and suffered so much because of it. And now, finally, I understand a little bit. These were poor, not very educated people, living in a society that treated them as less than human, and they found a community where they could become a human being, with something to believe in and belong to. Of course, when they finally realized the whole of this life was wrong, or an illusion..." Yang shrugs.

So much was lost to these people. Lives, time, hope, nationality, any sense of belonging, of home. Perhaps they were destined to lose everything the moment they set foot on those boats to travel to Japan. As the novelist Min Jin Lee writes in her gripping Zainichi family saga *Pachinko*, set during and after Japan's occupation of Korea: "There was always talk of Koreans going back home. But in a way, all of them had lost the home in their minds for good."

One suspects that the fate of Yang Yong-hi's siblings was shared by many of those 1970s Zainichi returnees to North Korea, but what of those who ignored Kim's siren song and instead attempted to find their roots in the south?



It was early in the morning, too early for any good to come of a knock at the door. Kang Jang-heon, twenty-four, dragged himself out of bed. Three men stood outside the door of his student accommodation in Seoul. They wanted to know about Kang's friends. Would he mind stepping outside for a moment? He threw on some clothes and followed the men downstairs. Waiting on the street was a military jeep with two armed soldiers. It was 1975, and South Korea was ruled by a military dictatorship headed by a Japanese-trained general, Park Chung-hee. People went missing in the Republic of Korea, and were never heard of again.

The military police bundled Kang off to a military jail where, following lengthy interrogation, he was charged with breaking national security laws. He had visited the enemy, North Korea, and received orders from the regime, said his accusers; he was the leader of "an underground group" that wanted to foment revolution in South Korea. They had no arrest warrant, he was not permitted to see a lawyer, and no communication was allowed with the outside world. For two months Kang was questioned and tortured using water and electric shocks. Eventually, he signed a confession.

Kang was born in Nara, Japan, in 1951 to Korean parents. His father had followed in his grandfather's footsteps, leaving Korea toward the end of the war, aged just fifteen, to become a clerical worker in Osaka. Kang's mother had made a similar journey and had met his father in Osaka.

Growing up in Japan in the 1950s, Kang realized early on that as a Zainichi, he would struggle. “I couldn’t see any light in Japan,” Kang tells me when I meet him later on in my trip in a rather dingy café in Tsuruhashi, the Korean quarter of Osaka, where he now lives. “You couldn’t get a government job. You couldn’t get any work in the public sector. You couldn’t enter big enterprise. I thought there would be little chance for me. That there were better opportunities in Korea.”

Despite not speaking any Korean, in 1971 Kang left Japan to study medicine at Seoul University, where he soon fell in with the pro-democracy crowd, which the military junta claimed were in the pocket of the North. “I was anti-Park and anti-Kim. I just wanted peace,” he tells me, referring to the then leaders of South and North Korea, respectively. In those days, the Japanese had much better access to North Korea, via regular ferry routes that sailed there from Japanese ports. Kang believes this is why he was singled out and accused of being the movement’s leader and a regular visitor to North Korea, despite never having set foot in the country.

He was indicted in January 1976 and over the course of the next fourteen months was tried three times, on each occasion appealing, and on each occasion the verdict handed down, not by a jury but by three judges, was guilty; their sentence: death from hanging. “At first, I felt that it wasn’t really happening. As each trial went on, I started to feel it was real and I grew afraid.”

Kang is now in his mid-sixties. He looks like the academic he eventually became, and currently teaches international relations at Doshisha University in Kyoto. Quiet, composed, without a trace of anger or bitterness, he speaks evenly to me about his ordeal.

After his sentencing, he was imprisoned with murderers, thieves, and rapists, handcuffed twenty-four hours a day, even while sleeping, and transferred to several different prisons over the years. At one point, after being denied his precious exercise time when he usually had a chance to meet other student prisoners, he went on a hunger strike. The guards tied him up and beat him for eight hours straight. Although the Japanese government did not initially intervene in his case, he suspects the South Korean authorities hesitated to kill him because of his connection to Japan.

Many other students who were found guilty of collusion with North Korea were hanged, but Amnesty International eventually became involved in Kang's case. Friends from Japan testified that he couldn't have visited North Korea on the dates the South Korean authorities claimed because he was in Hokkaido with them. In 1982, after six years on death row, his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, and then further reduced to twenty years. He ended up spending another seven years in prison before being released in December 1988 as the South Korean democracy movement built to critical mass and the Seoul Olympics shone a light into some of the darker recesses of the country's penal system.

"I couldn't sleep the night before I knew I was to be released," Kang recalls. "I just rubbed the wall of my cell, thinking to myself that my youth resided there. I remember in the morning, passing through so many gates, so many gates..." For a moment he looks past my shoulder to the wall behind me. "I was a little confused but eventually I reset my feelings. The people outside had always lived their lives, but I had to catch up with my lifestyle slowly, at my own pace."

Kang remains deeply attached to South Korea, and to the idea of reunifying the peninsula. He is able, he says, to separate the military junta that imprisoned him from the rest of the country he loves. "My complaint is between my family and the Korean government, not the people." He even has a positive take on his thirteen-year incarceration. "I got to know Korea in prison. The cell was a reflection of society. In university you tend to mix only with other students, but I learned a great deal in prison. I never gave up because my family and friends supported me all the time, and over the years I could sense that Korean society was changing toward democracy, little by little."

Kang was finally declared not-guilty by the Korean authorities in 2015, with the chief judge, Choi Kyu-hong, officially finding that the charges against him had been fabricated. He is seeking compensation. "It is not about the money—it's only about a million won per year [\$850] of imprisonment," Kang tells me, mildly. "The money doesn't pay for the hardship, that's not something I can be compensated for. The real thing I am

not happy about is that the Korean government has not said sorry. They have not apologized.”

Kang still does not have a Japanese passport, but does now have a South Korean one. He visits South Korea often and has even visited North Korea (in 1992, out of curiosity, he says). To me it seems strange that he feels more of an attachment to the land that tortured and imprisoned him than the country of his birth. Why doesn't he get a Japanese passport, as he tells me his brothers have done?

“My youth is in Korea; I have friends there. I identify myself as Korean,” he says, sipping his coffee. He looks up. “I am married and have children here, and the people of Japan are my friends, but Japan is not my country. Every time I go back to Korea, I feel like I am coming home. I think nationality is a human right, and you should have a right to choose.”



Not all Zainichi have been so determined to maintain their Korean identity. Tei Tai-kin is a professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University. Now sixty-nine, the son of a Japanese mother and a Korean father, he has dedicated much of his career to Japan-Korea relations, including fourteen years as a lecturer in Korean universities.

When he and I met in Tokyo, he told me he had little time for what he considers the victim mentality of many of his fellow Zainichi. He long ago chose to take Japanese citizenship and a Japanese name—his original name is Chung.

“When I moved to Korea I realized that there was not actually much sympathy in South Korea itself,” he said. “It was rather hypocritical.”

Tai-kin has a sister who has refused to take Japanese citizenship and kept her Korean name. Finding her career path blocked in the public sector in Japan, she took her case to the Tokyo courts, but lost the case.

“I think ethnic Koreans in Japan should acquire Japanese nationality,” said Tai-kin brusquely, when I asked him about his sister. “My little sister could have done this and continued to work in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

“[The Zainichi] demanded more and more; they were harassing and bullying Japan, they were hysterical, trying to punish the government of Japan. In the past, it is true that being Korean in Japan meant suffering discrimination, but not all Japanese discriminated; there were always some Japanese who sympathized, and those discriminations were abolished in the beginning of the 1980s—yet still the discussion continues. My position is, rather than criticizing Japan, I think it’s time that the ethnic Koreans here should decide what to do with their nationality.”

NARA

Having spent over a week shuttling around Tokyo and Yokohama, it is time for me to hit the road properly. Driving out of Yokohama, I stop off at the Foreign General Cemetery, up on a bluff overlooking the city. The cemetery was founded by Commodore Perry himself, to bury one of the sailors who died on his return visit to Japan in 1854, and in the 1890s it was the base for the first British arrivals.

I always find these foreign cemeteries in far-off corners of far-off lands quite moving. Perhaps it is the sense that the people buried here traveled to the other side of the world, to a country which, in Japan's case, genuinely was terra incognita at the time, and they did so in such hope, with such optimism, without being sure they would ever see home again. They were nineteenth-century astronauts, colonialists too of course, here to trade, exploit, enslave, or convert, but the residents of this cemetery never saw home again.

Those who did survive long enough re-created their peculiar upper-middle-class Victorian lives here in Yokohama with lawn tennis associations and cricket clubs, a horse racing track, libraries, schools, hospitals, and English-language newspapers. A small museum beside the cemetery tells some of their stories, including that of the American travel writer Eliza Scidmore, who died in Switzerland in 1928 but was so fond of

Yokohama that she stipulated that she be buried here alongside her brother and mother. Scidmore is recalled today on the other side of the world, in Washington, DC, as the woman who, inspired by her time in Japan, planted the cherry blossom trees along the banks of the Potomac.

I want to take the “pretty route” west from Yokohama today, which means sticking to the Tōkaidō Highway, the ancient road running the 450 miles between Tokyo and Kyoto. Before I set off, I imagine this to be a semi-rural, two-lane road, a historic postal-route-type of thing on which I will occasionally encounter small villages of wooden-houses and shrines, with cobblestones and samurai mansions, maybe a wise, wizened old soothsayer or two, or pipe-smoking priests—that kind of thing—but it soon becomes apparent that the Tōkaidō is the very opposite of this, an unrelenting litany of car dealerships, rusty vending machines, cookie-cutter housing, vast gas stations, fast-food joints, light-industry parks, strip malls, pylons, and billboards—all of which I have ample time to enjoy, as the traffic rarely moves faster than 20 miles per hour.

Actually, I don’t mean that “enjoy” sarcastically at all. The nature of the Japan fetishist is such that he or she can experience shivering frissons of excitement at the most quotidian of Japanese sights—a billboard campaign for coffee featuring Tommy Lee Jones floating in a bathing ring, for instance, or a time-warp 1960s shopfront—so it is no great hardship that my first day is a treacly crawl in heavy drizzle for the entire hundred miles to Shizuoka, my first overnight stop. Shizuoka is rather lovely too, squeezed between bamboo forests, mountains, and the sea. Any land not built upon is given over to plump green tea bushes, a balm for the eyes, and any spaces between are so overgrown with rapacious vines and greenery that I imagine if the people of Japan went on holiday for a week, the whole place would be reclaimed by the jungle by the time they returned.

A couple of random, motoring-related things strike me during my first day’s drive. There are no roundabouts in this country, but boy, do the Japanese love traffic lights. There is a set every couple of hundred yards or so, which is tediously enervating. Even when there is no traffic, the Japanese drive at a cautious pace: on one two-lane highway, the speed limit is 30 miles per hour. Japanese cars and even trucks are meticulously

maintained, with not a speck of dirt, but they only seem to come in three colors: white, black, or silver, mostly white. I see not a single Korean car. Not one Kia, no Hyundais, not so much as a single SsangYong, despite the fact that South Korea is the world's fifth-largest car manufacturer.

I pass some of the journey with my ongoing game of Japanese car name bingo, spotting old favorites like the Nissan Cedric, the Toyota Ractis, and, for a maximum ten points, the Mazda Bongo Friendee. I do still wonder why nobody at Japanese companies ever bothered to run their slogans by someone who speaks English as a first language. Even back in the 1980s, when there was a rash of such names and anything "foreign" was deemed exotic and cool, it couldn't have been that difficult to find out that, say, "Calpis" and "Pocari Sweat" were not ideal names for soft drinks.

To me, though, this linguistic hubris evokes a Japan of unfettered confidence, one that felt it could mold the English language itself to suit its purposes. Can you imagine how great it was to be Japanese in the 1980s? Your country had recovered from the atrocities of war, rebuilt itself from virtual bankruptcy in the 1940s, when the average annual income per capita was on a par with a Sri Lankan's, into one of the richest and most technologically advanced nations on earth, with bullet trains, portable TVs, and enough money to persuade Harrison Ford to advertise pretty much anything. Westerners no longer recoiled from your eating habits; indeed, Manhattan was in thrall to platinum-card sushi joints, which was fortunate because Japan Inc. owned a good chunk of New York City.

The excesses of Tokyo in the 1980s are legendary: the members-only Ginza restaurants where high rollers ate sushi from the naked bodies of geisha; the vintage Ferraris bought on a whim and left to rot in Nakameguro basement garages; the gold leaf sprinkled liberally over Wagyu tartare; and the old-master paintings bought by the yard to hang on the walls of corporate bathrooms.

Such profligacy seems an age away now. For more than two decades, the story has been of Japanese "stagnation" and an economy doomed by irreversible demographic decline. I suspect Japanese businesspeople have been quite happy to maintain that perception in negotiations with foreigners, but any visitor to Japan can see that things are not as bad as is

made out. This still at least looks like an incredibly wealthy, highly developed country, with among the best living conditions in the world. So what is the reality of Japan's economic misadventure? What went wrong, and what's going right?

Legend has it that at the height of the boom, in 1989, the land occupied by the grounds of the Imperial Palace—an area roughly the size of Disneyland, at the bull's-eye center of Tokyo—was valued at more than all of California's real estate combined. To give you an idea of how out-of-kilter property prices had become in relation to the size of the economy, that made the palace worth approximately \$5.1 trillion. Japan's total GDP in 1989 was \$5.3 trillion. And then the bubble burst.

The stark figures are these: Within two years, the square-meter price for property in the Japanese capital had dropped by 80 percent, in some cases more. The Nikkei, Japan's stock market, plummeted 60 percent.

The simple explanation is that companies and institutions were allowed to borrow money in quantities so enormous, they ended up threatening the economy of what was then the second-richest nation on earth. The Bank of Japan (BOJ) got carried away with the amazing growth achieved off the back of industrial exports in the 1970s and loaned so much cash that it fueled one of the greatest property booms in human history. To combat the resulting inflation, the bank increased interest rates, and all those companies with loans suddenly found they could not repay them. The government was forced to step in to prop up those deemed too big to fail. At the same time, manufacturers that had prospered in the 1970s by adding value to imported raw materials by manufacturing high-quality, high-tech products, faced growing competition from fast-developing rivals in South Korea and Taiwan and, later, China too. To revive the economy, Japan resorted to increased spending financed by borrowing, which is how it ended up with a debt ratio of 236 percent of GDP today (even Greece is only at 180 percent).

In his book *Dogs and Demons: The Fall of Modern Japan*, American author Alex Kerr lays the blame at the feet of Japan's ruling elite, particularly the bureaucracy and its refusal to modernize: "Japan's way of doing things—running a stock market, designing highways, making movies

—essentially froze in about 1965,” he writes. The country does appear to have been stuck in its ways, and in many respects—particularly the participation of women in the labor market, on company boards, and in government—it still is.

The economy stopped growing in the early 1990s, but it didn’t actually shrink that much, and even in the dark days, unemployment never exceeded 6 percent (at least, not according to official statistics). Today *The Washington Post* claims that Japan’s “economy has done so well the last few years that it has almost entirely made up all the ground it [lost] during its protracted slump in the 1990s.” But things were never as bad as they seemed. The country’s declining workforce made the overall GDP figure look worse than it actually was; GDP per working age adult—the amount individuals actually contribute economically—has remained buoyant, outperforming the UK and equally the United States. In other words, there may be fewer Japanese people, but they are as productive as ever. The number of women working has increased by 7 percent over the last six years too.

Government debt is still eye-popping, and low inflation doesn’t help in repaying that debt; plus, the declining population is going to have an impact on tax revenues in the future, but in 2018, at least, Japan had a trade surplus of \$189 billion. The debt is mostly held within Japan too, so there is little risk of a lender coming knocking. Japanese companies are also said to be sitting on at least two trillion dollars’ worth of cash, perhaps half the nation’s entire wealth. Much of the rest is sitting under mattresses: the Japanese are notable hoarders of cash.

Reports of Japan’s demise may have been exaggerated then, but the country now has one of the highest relative poverty rates of any developed nation—a sixth of the population—and almost two-thirds report that they find life financially tough. Meanwhile, Japan’s Gini coefficient—a measure of relative economic equality—is higher than the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average; this was once one of the most equal societies in the world, an entire nation of middle-class people, but inequality is growing. The majority of Japanese parents believe their children will be financially worse off than they are.

Perhaps the single greatest contributor to that sense of pessimism is the precarious employment market, which fuels economic insecurity and in turn makes people hold on to their money instead of spending it and stimulating the economy. Almost 40 percent of workers are now on temporary contracts, which means they are less inclined to marry and have children, and more vulnerable to being coerced into working long hours. According a government report, 20 percent of Japanese companies admitted that their employees worked more than eighty hours of overtime per month; a working day of twenty hours is not unusual. As a consequence, there are roughly two hundred official *karoshi* incidents, in which people work themselves to death, every year, although some believe the true figure runs into the thousands.

Over the next day, driving to Nara, the scenery tells this story of the rise and stalling of Japanese industry. I pass the Fujifilm factory, challenged by the arrival of digital cameras and the inexorable rise of the smartphone; the headquarters of Toshiba, which suffered a catastrophic accounting scandal in 2015; and beleaguered Toyota, which has recalled a record number of vehicles in recent years.

I pass over Nagoya and the Nobi Plain, one of the epicenters of Japan's incredible postwar industrial growth. Today it is a vision of the future as seen from 1975—an endless concrete agglomeration of tower-blocks, slag heaps, gas storage tanks, and warehouses. There are forests of pylons and, down by the docks, row upon row of gigantic red-and-white cranes. Most magnificent of all is the cat's cradle of overpasses that helps me leapfrog the churning brown waters below, and a little farther south, by the Ibi River, I pass above the largest roller-coaster I have ever seen.

Finally free of Nagoya's urban-industrial sprawl, the road climbs into green mountains, today shrouded by clouds. As I descend on the other side, I come to Nara. This was briefly the capital of Japan in the eighth century and today is famous for its highly Instagrammable sika deer, which saunter like pampered concubines through the town center's shrines, streets, and parks. The sika are a pretty hazelnut color with antlers and a scattering of lighter spots down their backs, like snowfall. They are tame to the point of blasé as far as humans are concerned, and pose nonchalantly in front of the

more picturesque pagodas. I stoop down to take a selfie with one and only notice later, looking at the photograph, that the animal had started to eat the brim of my hat as I pressed the button.

Nara is a wistful, mystical kind of town that really comes into its own in the early evening when the day-trippers have retreated back to Kyoto; the tightly topiaried hat-stand pine trees throw freaky shadows, and the narrow, mazelike back streets are left to the town's four-legged inhabitants, lending it a vaguely postapocalyptic mood. Instead of cockroaches, only the deer have survived.

But there was no apocalypse for Japan's economy, not really, and these days its slow, manageable decline doesn't look all that bad from the outside. Whenever I start thinking about Japan's economic plight, I always come back to a quote in David Pilling's excellent book about Japan, *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival*. Pilling, a former *Financial Times* Asia editor, reports a British member of Parliament visiting Tokyo, staring up in wonder at the glitter of Ginza and saying: "If this is a recession, I want one."

Perhaps, Pilling writes, we need to readjust how we assess economies and their success, because, above all, if you travel in Japan, you will experience a country that functions better than almost any other in the world on almost every level, from its low crime rates and exemplary public transport to its extremely high levels of civic responsibility, not to mention the best service culture you will ever enjoy. It's still rich in real terms too—according to *Bloomberg*, Japan has more millionaires than Germany and China. Combined.

Looking back, the greatest blow dealt to the Japanese may well have been to their pride. In 2010 China overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy, restoring the ancient Confucian order of things with China as the Middle Kingdom, the center of the world, the big brother.

There is one thing that the Japanese still have money for: their military, or rather their Self-Defense Forces, as they are called. Military spending—largely incentivized by China's growing maritime power—has been rising for the last six years and is at a record high (5.19 trillion yen, or \$42 billion). The spending increases have been championed by the current

prime minister, Abe Shinzo, who is attempting to make other, more deep-reaching changes to militarize Japanese society further. He wants to revise its postwar pacifist constitution so that the military might one day be used elsewhere in the world for purposes other than providing humanitarian assistance.

For some, his proposals are seen as restoring the country's pride and independence; for others, he is dragging Japan in a regressive direction with uncomfortable echoes of its imperial past, a past with which Abe and his associates do not appear to have entirely reconciled.

KYOTO

I get Kyoto wrong every time. I must have visited this ancient, unknowable, ugly-beautiful city a dozen or so times yet, still, it catches me unawares.

The first occasion I came here, I had an idea I would somehow step off the bullet train into seventeenth-century feudal Japan but instead I found myself marooned in the hostile concrete wasteland around the station. On another occasion, I stayed in a hotel in the far north of the city, miles from anywhere. Often I have walked for hours along soulless, six-lane roads lined with anonymous office buildings and Starbucks, keenly aware that richly textured, time-warp back streets were somewhere nearabouts. And I always overstuff my itinerary with UNESCO World Heritage Sites—Kyoto has seventeen of them (Holland only has ten)—and get shrine blind by the end of the first day. My latest mistake: I have arrived as cherry blossom season begins.

There is almost no “low season” in Kyoto, but in late March/early April the fabled *sakura* are blooming, and, as a result, I have never seen the city—any city—as busy, or as pink. The Japanese government’s post-bubble tourism drive has seen visitor figures soar from 6 million in 2011 to 31 million in 2018. It has been a tonic for the economy and is expected to peak with the 2020 Olympics, but many feel it is destroying the essential nature of places like Kyoto.

I press on through the crowds to catch some of the *sakura* action. Contrary to expectations, far from being a “seen one, seen them all” kind of deal, my first glimpse of a flowering cherry blossom tree only makes me greedy for more, and I spend most of the rest of my first day in the city walking around taking photographs of the blooms in an unedifying rapture. I realize I am a lost cause when, at one point, a small child runs past me, catching the blossoms as a gust of wind blows, and I surreptitiously put out my hand to catch some too.

Auspiciously, not only is there an abundance of cherry blossoms, but on my first night in the city, there is a full moon to boot. It is a “meditation-on-the-fleeting-nature-of-existence” double-whammy, guaranteed to send the Japanese into a collective swoon. They softly chant *sugoi* (“wonderful”) and form orderly queues to stand in one particular spot for the perfect view of the trees overhanging the Kamo River, with the moon beaming down. A man with a megaphone corrals the orderly crowd as we shuffle forward to take our photographs, get our billing and cooing over and done with, and move on.

Kyoto has an almost mystical significance for the Japanese, partly because it was the capital from AD 794 to the Meiji Restoration of 1868, including, crucially, the *sakoku*, the closed period. This was the era of unification and relative peace, the lotus-eating time when the samurai class indulged in their ritualized tea ceremonies, calligraphy, poetry, elaborate multicourse meals, and precision gardening. At least, this is the commonly held perception of Japan in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries.

“You do have to be careful about those preconceptions of Japan being isolated, because it went through phases of profound engagement with Asia and the rest of the world,” explains Professor John Breen, whom I meet for lunch the next day. Japan always maintained contact with the outside world, mostly via China from the western island of Kyushu and the Ryukyu Islands (modern-day Okinawa) he says, but also with Russia from eastern Japan; and in Nagasaki there was trade with Europe via the small Dutch presence that was based there. Communication with Korea, just a short hop across the water from northern Kyushu, was fairly continuous too.

“Of course, Commodore Perry’s arrival was important, but there were all sorts of things going on in Japan before that. There were serious internal social problems already in place,” says Breen, an expert on the history of religious institutions in Japan. If it hadn’t been the Americans, then the French, the Russians, the British, or even the Germans would have attempted to open Japan, he adds. So much for my “blame the Americans” theory.

Breen is married to a Japanese woman with whom he has three grown children. He taught Japanese at London University for twenty years before moving to Kyoto ten years ago. He reminds me of a young John Berger, with unruly curly hair, a lined face, and a square jaw. He is exceptionally knowledgeable about Japan and its history. Even among Japanese people, Breen is recognized as an expert on the history of Shinto, the country’s ancient religion. He is also remarkably well-connected. During our talk, he lets slip that he has met the emperor, empress, and crown prince; the latter, he suspects, shares his father’s unspoken liberal values. When we set up our lunch appointment, I had noticed that the last four digits of his mobile phone number were 1868 (the year of the Meiji Restoration).

Breen and I have met in a tofu restaurant beside the Kamo River in central Kyoto. I specifically want to talk about Shinto, and the Yasukuni Shrine, arguably the most controversial religious site in Asia.

Of all the niggling, needless sources of friction between Japan and its neighbors, the one whose resolution would seem to me to bring disproportionate dividends for all parties has to be the apparently deliberately provocative visits by Japanese ministers, prime ministers, and other prominent figures to the Yasukuni Shrine.

Located within walking distance of the Imperial Palace in central Tokyo, the shrine honors around 2.3 million war dead—mostly men, but also some women and even animals—who died fighting for Japan up until 1945. No one is actually buried at Yasukuni; no ashes are interred there. The symbolic enshrinement of the spirits of the dead, their names written on pieces of paper, is enacted in special nighttime rites to the accompaniment of a wailing flute. Their spirits then reside in a special receptacle, the *nainaijin*, which is housed in the *honden*, the main hall.

This ought not be controversial. There are military memorials in virtually every country on earth; four hundred thousand soldiers are buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, for instance, and US presidents visit frequently without anyone making a fuss. The problem is that Yasukuni is inextricably linked to Japan's imperial past. Even more problematic is that, in 1978, fourteen Class A Japanese war criminals—men found guilty of crimes against peace and humanity, the men who orchestrated the war—were secretly enshrined there. No emperor has visited since, but fourteen prime ministers have, including one who was a Christian (Ōhira Masayoshi) and Abe Shinzo. Some see a Japanese prime minister visiting Yasukuni as akin to Angela Merkel paying her respects at the site of Hitler's bunker. Abe stopped visiting in 2013, possibly at the request of President Obama.

Another point of controversy is that the spirits of around fifty thousand Korean and Taiwanese soldiers are also enshrined in Yasukuni, a legacy of a time when many men were conscripted from occupied lands to fight for Japan. Rather like the Church of the Latter Day Saints, who perform posthumous baptisms, at Yasukuni they will enshrine you whether you like it or not. Relatives have protested, including in Japanese courts, but to no avail. Yasukuni has a policy of never removing anyone once they have been enshrined.

I first visited Yasukuni many years ago, by chance during the annual 15th of August commemoration marking the end of World War II. There was a large crowd of all ages, many carrying parasols to ward off the sun, but there was also a sizable contingent of ultra-nationalists with their megaphones and minivans parked on the street nearby. In the broad avenue leading up to the entrance of the shrine were gathered several men wearing colonial-era military uniforms. Some were young, but others were old enough to be war veterans, including one man whom I think was a kamikaze pilot. Another pilgrim stood in front of the main shrine building dressed in an all-white uniform, rigid as a clothespin, holding a six-meter flagpole flying the imperial Japanese flag.

“At the major occasions you do see these guys strutting around in imperial army uniforms, and there are even punch-ups between them and

Japan-resident Koreans,” Breen tells me as we sit at the restaurant counter in Kyoto. Yasukuni literally means “shrine of the land of peace,” but Breen has described it as “a place of violence.”

“The priests at Yasukuni shrine could refuse access to ultra right-wing groups; they could request the police remove them ... The shrine does no such thing,” Breen has written. In recent years Yasukuni has also attracted foreign right-wing pariahs like Jean-Marie Le Pen and leaders of the British National Party.

Breen has visited Yasukuni with veterans, including surviving kamikaze, and once gave a lecture there. “The kamikaze survived because the weather was bad the day they were supposed to fly, or their plane had had some faults and was forced to return, or the war ended before they had a chance to complete their mission,” he explains. “One of the veterans asked me about this question of apologizing and pointed out that, you know, coming from the world’s first and greatest empire, don’t you think it’s time that Britain apologized if you are going to insist that Japan apologizes? And I said that I agreed with him entirely!”

Even among the veterans, there were different takes on the apology issue, which is another sensitive subject in terms of relations with Korea and China. “There are those who say the emperor should have apologized for the war, others who say leave the emperor out of it.” Some of the veterans were Buddhists, some Christians, some were even communists, but they had all returned to Yasukuni to pray for the souls of their comrades. “A lot of these guys felt they had been forced to sacrifice their lives in pointless ways, and they felt a profound anger toward the senior officers who’d sent them there.” Some were former officers themselves, but they strongly opposed the enshrinement of the war criminals at Yasukuni. “Those who led us into war should be treated differently from those who did not,” they told Breen.

Breen’s Japan research group once invited a member of the Nippon Kaigi—the right-wing revisionist group that counts many leading Japanese politicians among its members—to talk to the group. “Afterward, we went for a drink and I asked him about the emperor. He was really angry with him. He felt that the emperor should visit Yasukuni with pride—he used the

Japanese word *dodoto*, which means ‘boldly’—and that his visit would have a profound impact on the morals of Japanese youth, that they would learn how to be a patriotic Japanese.”

What does it mean to be a “patriotic Japanese”? For many, it means facing up honestly to Japan’s past, but for those on the right wing, such self-reflection is considered masochistic and detrimental to the morale of the nation.

During my travels in South Korea and China, several people expressed to me the idea that the Japanese were special, and not in a good way. For them, Yasukuni was a symptom of this kind of deficiency of humanity, or lack of empathy. “How can the people look so polite and rational but regard those criminals as their heroes?” one Chinese student asked me. “Is there something more complex deep in their culture?” For the record, John Breen does not agree that the Japanese are different or deficient in this way, but in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Ruth Benedict’s 1946 book about Japanese culture, Benedict, considered a great expert on Japan at the time, reflected that there were supposedly no moral absolutes in Japanese culture. Theirs was a shame culture, as opposed to our Western guilt culture, with its clearer (to us) moral landscape of right and wrong, guilty and innocent. In shame cultures, one’s choices are driven by preservation of reputation rather than a moral code: getting caught is the crime. Though her book was a huge bestseller in Japan, these days, many of Benedict’s opinions are considered somewhat outdated, an aspect of the Orientalist othering identified by Edward Said, but there is still broad agreement on the shame/guilt distinction between Asian societies and Western ones. Martin Jacques, writing in *When China Rules the World*, believes that in Asian societies it is “how one is regarded by others, rather than one’s own individual conscience, which is critical ... A sense of guilt can be assuaged by an act of apology; shame, in contrast, is not nearly as easily assuaged.” Perhaps, then, this explains some of the inadequacies of Japanese apologies for their wartime behavior from a Chinese and Korean perspective: an apology is not really enough, can never be enough. The stain of shame will always linger.

I had wondered whether Shinto, as one of the unique aspects of Japanese culture and history, held some explanation for the perceived

otherness of the Japanese by their neighbors. The first written records of Japan's ancient belief system date from the sixth century BC, but one can easily imagine its shamanistic, nature-focused belief that all natural things (and these days, man-made objects too) are inhabited by gods, might have existed in some form as long as humans have lived in Japan, or anywhere, for that matter. Shinto has no founder or prophet, no creed or commandments, no sacred texts. More problematic from a contemporary perspective is that its role as a state religion was inextricably linked with the pursuit of Japan's imperial ambitions. The conversion of the Koreans and Taiwanese to Shinto was an important aspect of their assimilation into the Japanese empire, and the racial superiority that the imperialists believed was bestowed by the origins of the religion was used as a justification for their colonialism. This is why, when the Allies arrived in 1945, one of the key elements of the postwar constitution they drew up for Japan was the separation of state and religion, as laid out in Article 20. General MacArthur even considered demolishing Yasukuni, but one story suggests he was persuaded against it by two Catholic priests.

Despite the hullabaloo over the visits by many prime ministers and ministers over the years, Yasukuni is actually a private shrine, not a state site for mourning or worship, so ministerial visits are technically breaking Article 20 of the constitution. But the constitution also guarantees freedom of worship for everyone. To use the latter to circumvent the former, some prime ministers have visited as private individuals—the technicalities involved in this extend as far as making sure they don't travel to the shrine in government cars or use their title when singing the visitors' book, and that gifts are not paid for with government funds. (It gets quite silly at times: Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro insisted his visit was okay because he only bowed once at the shrine instead of twice.) The ruling Liberal Democratic Party have long wanted to revoke Article 20, partly in order to make Yasukuni a national place of commemoration and thus eligible for state patronage and funding.

Nakasone, who had seen active service during the war as a naval officer, was the first prime minister to visit after the controversial enshrinement of the Class A war criminals. (A heads-up on Nakasone: He once declared that

Japanese people were more intelligent than Americans because their average IQ had not been diluted by “blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans.”) That was in 1985, the fortieth anniversary of Japan’s surrender. At the time, Beijing had no problem with Nakasone paying his respects. Indeed, he had informed the Chinese government, then led by his friend President Hu Yaobang, that he would be making the visit, and Hu had agreed not to make a fuss about it. But shortly afterward, a delegation from the Japanese Socialist Party visited Beijing to pour poison in the Chinese leadership’s ear. “The Yasukuni visits were one step toward the militarization of Japan,” they told the Chinese, and soon, as a result, there were anti-Japan protests on the streets of China.

It was over a decade before another prime minister dared to publicly visit, but Koizumi Junichiro (prime minister from 2001 to 2006) made it part of his election campaign, some say because he needed the support of the Nihon Izoku-kai (“Japan Society of War-Bereaved Families”), and according to polls at the time, 65 percent of Japanese supported prime ministerial Yasukuni visits. Interviewed recently by the *Financial Times*, Koizumi, now seventy-six, remained defiant on the issue: “Regardless of whether there are class-A war criminals, 3 million Japanese citizens lost their lives, so why is it strange to visit Yasukuni where so many of their spirits are enshrined?”

These days things have changed in terms of public opinion. Surveys tend to show the Japanese are marginally against prime ministerial visits; a recent poll showed 47 percent against vs. 43 percent in favor, for example. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Abe Shinzo, though a pro-Yasukuni militarist, hasn’t been to the shrine since 2013. He does send ritual offerings, though, such as money or small trees.

I asked Philip Seaton, an Englishman who is an associate professor of media and communications at Hokkaido University and who has written extensively about the country’s relations with its former enemies, whether Abe’s previous visits were intended to be a defiant gesture to foreign critics of Yasukuni. “No, I think he is saying, ‘This is my belief system and if I don’t go there, I am betraying myself,’” says Seaton. “In order for his political and philosophical world to make sense, he has to go. I don’t think

he cares what the Chinese think; he would much rather they turned the other way and ignored him. That would make his life much easier. He is not trying to rile the Chinese.” John Breen disagrees: “I think it is very much an act of defiance.”

Do Yasukuni visits really rile the Chinese? The reaction of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party seems to ebb and flow depending on the domestic situation. “The Chinese problematization of the issue has always intensified as domestic political issues have become graver” is how John Breen puts it. Yasukuni has, however, been the target of attacks by Korean and Chinese civilians. In 2011 a Chinese man set fire to one of the shrine’s *shinmon*—a brown gate; in 2013 a Korean man threw methylbenzene inside the shrine, possibly as a prelude to setting fire to it; and in 2015 a Korean man blew up the toilets. I don’t think anyone is suggesting they were sent by their respective governments; they were acting of their own volition.

What few mention in discussions about Yasukuni is that just down the road is Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, Japan’s official, state-funded, nonreligious national site of war remembrance, which foreign dignitaries visit with prime ministers and the emperor on special occasions. In Chidorigafuchi, Japan already has a place to memorialize the war, an uncontroversial site free from the spirits of war criminals, and from right-wing thugs. Every year on August 15, both the emperor and the prime minister of Japan attend a memorial service at the nearby Budokan stadium in central Tokyo to express their sorrow for the devastation that Japan caused in the war. In 2018, as he had done most years, then eighty-four-year-old Emperor Akihito made his final appearance at the ceremony as emperor (before his abdication in 2019) and again expressed “deep remorse” on behalf of his people for the war waged in his father’s name. Unfortunately, at the same time, fifty members of the Diet, including Koizumi Shinjiro, son of the former prime minister and the man many tip as a future leader of Japan, were visiting Yasukuni.

Before I left Tokyo on this journey around East Asia, I revisited Yasukuni. I had just read an opinion piece written for the *Telegraph* newspaper by the Chinese ambassador to London, Liu Xiaoming, in which

he likened the shrine to a horcrux, one of the seven vessels containing Harry Potter's nemesis Voldemort's soul (apparently): "If militarism is like the haunting Voldemort of Japan, the Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo is a kind of horcrux, representing the darkest parts of that nation's soul," he wrote.

Japan has many ancient temples and shrines—eery, majestic, unknowable places, such as the Ise Grand Shrine in Mie Prefecture and Izumo Taisha in Shimane Prefecture, which are believed to be more than one thousand years old. Because of the fuss made about it, and the reverence in which senior members of the government appear to hold it, I had always assumed that Yasukuni's roots must also go back centuries, and as I walked up the broad, paved approach lined with cherry blossom trees, passing through the two large torii gateways to reach the *honden*, I tried to be more sympathetic to its role as a national focal point. Who was I as an outsider to judge the premedieval spiritual practices of the Japanese? Perhaps we should just tolerate them, as we tolerate other, similarly offensive rituals and traditions, like the burning of the papal effigy in Lewes, England, on Bonfire Night, or as some people believe we should tolerate the Black Peters that appear every Christmas in Holland. Perhaps we should at the very least attempt to understand Yasukuni.

I had the shrine virtually to myself this time and explored the complex a little more, discovering that, tucked away around a corner from the main shrine, is a surprisingly large museum, the Yūshūkan. It was at this museum that I learned that far from being an ancient shrine from a less-enlightened time, Yasukuni was built in 1869 specifically to enshrine the spirits of soldiers who had fought and died during the brief scrap that heralded the Meiji Restoration. That bombshell came later on in my visit; the first shocking moment came in the museum's entrance hall, which featured a bold little ensemble of a kamikaze plane, a manned torpedo, a WWII-era Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter plane (whose blurb boasted of how it shot down "nearly every one of the enemy planes" in its first battle and "was the best carrier-based fighter in the world"), a howitzer used in the defense of Okinawa against the United States, and a steam locomotive—the first, in fact—from the Burma Railway, otherwise known as the Death Railway.

On a plaque beside the train was inscribed: “It was to be retired in 1977, but members of the southern forces field railroad squadron who were involved in the construction of the Thai-Burma Railroad contributed funds and bought it back from the Thai national railroad. In 1979 it was dedicated to Yasukuni Jinja (shrine).” Around thirteen thousand Allied prisoners-of-war and one hundred thousand Asian forced laborers died building that railway, the story of which was depicted in the 1957 David Lean movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Of those victims, there was no mention in the museum. As I stood back to look again at the locomotive, a small boy ran past yelling and laughing, waving a wooden sword.

Clearly, a great deal of money had been spent on the museum, but its running costs are presumably subsidized in part by the gift shop, where souvenirs on sale included models of imperial planes, tanks, and warships; Yasukuni candy; and glossy books about Japan’s colonial era.

There were just a handful of other visitors taking in the strange, parallel universe depicted in the museum’s displays, in which Japan waged an entirely honorable war, completely free of atrocities, against the West’s “naked imperialistic demands” on Asia; all the Japanese soldiers were “well-disciplined” and “brave,” and the Chinese were “weak,” positively welcoming Japan’s intervention against the Western powers in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion: “[The Japanese soldiers] were respected and applauded by the residents of Beijing in contrast to the Western powers’ soldiers, who looted wherever they went.” Japan had “inspired other oppressed peoples” of Asia to rise up against the colonialists, including the Indians, who apparently hadn’t even considered the possibility of their own freedom until presented with Japan’s shining example. The bad guys were clearly the Americans, who, as the former supplier of 70 percent of Japan’s oil, steel, rubber, and other raw materials, held the country ransom and practically forced the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor when they imposed their sanctions in the late 1930s. Japan’s attempts to sue for peace were rejected by the Allies, and the war was eventually lost due to some unspecified clerical-type errors “which brought unspeakable human miseries on the fate of Japanese soldiers.”

What to make of all this? There is an argument to be made that Japan did liberate a good part of Asia from Western colonial interference. It can also claim to have prevented a potential takeover of the Korean Peninsula by the Russians or Chinese. However, when I was in Nanjing, I visited a museum dedicated to the 1937 massacre of as many as two hundred thousand Chinese troops and civilians by the Japanese Imperial Army. The curator of the museum offered this riposte to the “Japan-as-savior-of-Asia” narrative: “China was a sovereign country. It did not need the assistance of a foreign force, and even if it did, using the military methods that Japan used completely undermines their argument. Put it this way: imagine if today China invaded Japan on the pretext of liberating it from the Americans and their tens of thousands of armed forces stationed there. How would Japan feel?”

I continued my tour of the Yasukuni museum. There were some extraordinary artifacts, including a rope made with hair donated by ten thousand Japanese women, presumably keen to demonstrate their commitment to the war effort, which took a year to make, and photographs of young Japanese soldiers. In one, a young kamikaze pilot is literally nuzzling a puppy. The kamikaze are the superstars of Yasukuni. It venerates these young men with an uncomplicated sentimentality.

The museum’s critics usually point out the fourteen Class A war criminals who are enshrined at Yasukuni, such as former prime minister Tojo Hideki, and General Matsui, who was in charge in Nanjing during the massacre, but I wondered about the Class B and Class C war criminals. They were hardly saints. Among them are soldiers and officers who executed prisoners of war, for example, or committed numerous other serious war crimes. All are venerated indiscriminately as “glorious spirits.” Not only that, but a link is clearly made between their “sacrifice” and the postwar success of Japanese society. In the rhetoric of Yasukuni, that economic success was built upon the sacrifice of the kamikaze, the soldiers, and, most of all, the officers.

Abe Shinzo and others have used the Arlington National Cemetery defense: other countries pay their respects to their war dead, so why can’t Japan? It is true that there may well be people who could be considered war

criminals buried in American armed forces cemeteries. There are certainly Confederate generals at Arlington; General Samuel Koster, infamous for his role in the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam in 1968, is buried at West Point Cemetery; and General Curtis LeMay is buried at the United States Air Force Academy Cemetery in Colorado. LeMay was the man responsible for the 1945 firebombing of Tokyo, which killed one hundred thousand people and was arguably the worst individual instance of mass killing of noncombatants in military history. LeMay himself admitted, “If I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal.” Meanwhile, in London in 1992, a statue was erected on Whitehall to air chief marshal Sir Arthur “Bomber” Harris, responsible for the bombing of civilians in Dresden in contravention of the 1922 Washington Treaty. Some consider Harris a war criminal too.

Then there is the “victor’s justice” criticism, which points out that the trials of Japanese war criminals by the Allies in Tokyo in 1946 were fatally flawed. The trials were arguably more concerned about the postwar order, and there were probably many, many more men who were guilty of crimes, possibly Class A crimes, who got off free. Some even ended up at the head of major Japanese corporations or, like Abe’s grandfather Kishi Nobusuke, running the country. (Kishi was initially categorized as a Class A war criminal. He had overseen slave labor in Manchuria in the late 1930s and early 1940s and was imprisoned for three years after the war, but was never charged and went on to become prime minister of Japan in the late 1950s.)

There is another argument in favor of Yasukuni (although perhaps not its museum). Part of the unspoken pact inherent in having a military—the deal between governments and the people they send to fight their wars—is that the soldiers will be accorded respect and memorialized in the event of their deaths. “If you think about it, what is the obligation of the government?” Philip Seaton asked me. “It is to honor the troops that have served and died in its name. Every military needs its commemorative system so that you can persuade ordinary men to volunteer to go off and fight and die. To do that, they need to believe that if they go off and sacrifice themselves, they will be honored. This is not just Japan—it’s every country. It is just inconvenient that the Japanese lost. The actual process is

precisely the same.” As Japanese army veteran Kondo Hajime told a BBC documentary crew in 2000: “If you go to war and die in action, then you become a god and are enshrined at the Yasukuni shrine and the emperor will kindly come and pray for you.” Not for nothing did the Japanese forces give their disastrous retreat from Burma the nickname “the Road to Yasukuni.”

As John Breen points out, the shrine is far from uncontroversial among the Japanese themselves. “In Japanese, it is rare to hear the word ‘Yasukuni’ in isolation,” he tells me during our lunch in Kyoto. “It is invariably paired with the noun *mondai*. That means ‘problem,’ as in *Yasukuni mondai*, Yasukuni problem.”

For now, at least, the problem has been parked in the name of better Sino-Japanese relations, much to the relief of all involved. It will probably remain that way unless Abe, or a successor, recommences those controversial August 15 visits.

OSAKA

During the bubble years, Japan spent some of its money building museums. Many of them are bafflingly specialized, and seemingly free from the burden of commerce. Often they are housed in flamboyant concrete buildings that reflect their theme—the horseshoe crab-shaped Horseshoe Crab Museum in Kasaoka is one of my favorites.

One more serious subgenre of this late-eighties building spree are those museums intended to memorialize the suffering of specific cities or prefectures during the war. The last of these to open, in 1991, just as the final gasps of air were draining from the Japanese economic balloon, was the Osaka International Peace Center (known as Peace Osaka) on the grounds of Osaka Castle.

When it opened, Peace Osaka had by all accounts been quite progressive in the way it presented the context for the East Asian war, but following a campaign by local right-wingers, the tone of the museum has now changed. Despite the fact that the city is home to Japan's largest Zainichi population, Osaka's politicians have a reputation for "outspokenness" regarding Japan's ethnic minorities. In 2013 former mayor Toru Hashimoto caused outrage in South Korea when he claimed that the comfort women system of military brothels had been a necessary component of Japan's imperial strategy. And the current mayor, Yoshimura

Hirofumi, recently ended the city's sister relationship with San Francisco when a statue dedicated to the comfort women was erected in the American city's Chinatown.

I drive to Peace Osaka the next morning from Kyoto, and once inside the distinctive concrete and corrugated iron building that houses the center, it soon becomes apparent that the emphasis at the center today is mostly on the devastating US air raids in 1945 that claimed more than ten thousand lives, and on the suffering of the Osakans in general. One exhibit describes the Osakans as being "victimized" by the raids. Another stresses the courage of locals who were able "to cope with the air raids and tried to be excellent cooperative citizens"; there is even a bit on "Animals Victimized by War," about the city's zoo inhabitants. There is little reference to *why* the bombing was ordered, or to Japan's role in provoking it; instead, the center gently nudges visitors toward placing blame elsewhere: "Why did the US bomb densely populated Osaka so many times?"

By the early 1940s, Osaka had become "the Manchester of the East," one of Japan's main industrial centers, and the sixth-largest munitions-manufacturing city in the world. In the years beforehand, Japan had invaded several sovereign states, killed hundreds of thousands of their inhabitants, started a war with the United States when it bombed Pearl Harbor without warning, and undermined the stability of the entire Pacific region, but I learn nothing about this in Peace Osaka. In terms of Japanese provocation for the American raids, the museum alludes only to "rapidly increasing war dead" and "People who Migrated to Manchuria." But what was the nationality of those war dead? Why were Japanese people migrating to northeastern China? All is mystery. One exhibit is labeled "The People Waiting for Loved Ones Who Would Not be Coming Home," again with no reference to why the loved ones were abroad in the first place. "We were full of intense patriotism, thinking that we must win. If we were to lose, Japan would no longer exist," reads one testimony.

I leave the museum perplexed that a selective narrative like this could find a prominent place in what is generally considered Japan's second city, but in recent years, this kind of historical revisionism, or flat-out denial of

Japanese crimes, has moved into the mainstream, not just politically and in museums, but also in the magazine- and book-publishing worlds.

One of the highest-profile figures in the revisionist movement is O Sonfa, a Korean woman, born on the island of Jeju, now in her early sixties. When I met her in Tokyo the previous week, she had told me she had written as many as eighty books, many of which espoused her revisionist take on Japan's colonial era. O's works are part of the *kenchu-zokan* genre, meaning "dislike China, hate South Korea," big sellers in Japan in recent years. In 2013 three of the bestselling paperbacks in Japan were books attacking Korea, including O's bestseller *Bokanron (Theory of Stupid Korea)*. She had sold millions of copies, she said.

One of O's books has been translated into English: *Getting Over It! Why Korea Needs to Stop Bashing Japan*, a borderline unreadable litany of hairsplitting, repetitious grudge-settling and tendentious allegations. O claims, for instance, that there are 120,000 North Korean spies in South Korea, but offers no evidence for this. She is on firmer ground when she asserts that the South Koreans have fabricated a story of colonial resistance that ignores the fact that their liberation was an "incidental consequence" of the Allies' defeat of Japan; she is also right when she accuses Korean leaders of using anti-Japanese rhetoric for political gain.

This is the tricky thing about O and her ilk: there *were* Korean collaborators, but Japan ruled the peninsula for thirty-five years, so it would be strange if there hadn't been cooperation. Korea benefited from Japanese occupation in terms of infrastructure and development, and much later, during the 1960s, Japan transferred funds and knowledge to Korea that helped to boost its manufacturing economy. And, yes, Koreans have also done absolutely terrible things to one another since the civil war. O lists the postwar atrocities of South Korean dictators—the Gwangju and Jeju Massacres, the imprisonment and murder of pro-democracy activists, and so on—with relish (although, oddly, she excuses them all on the grounds of dictatorial necessity in the face of the threat of communism).

We met in the lobby of a posh Tokyo hotel. She brought along a female companion, who kindly acted as translator, and a young man who looked to be around twenty years old but who, it later transpired, was her publisher in

the Philippines. We all sat rather awkwardly around a low coffee table. O insisted that all the bad blood between the two nations was the fault of Korea and its outdated Confucian perspective of regional relations. “Even before the occupation, Korea used to look down on Japan,” she told me. “Even though the younger brother is much more successful than the elder brother, even though the younger brother is even richer and stronger, because he is the younger brother he needs to respect the elder brother. Korea thinks the younger brother doesn’t respect it.”

Again, there is some truth to this, as I would find out later in my journey, but to hear O describe Japan’s colonial past, you would think it was some kind of outreach project. “Japan tried to make Korea the same as Japan, at the same level of modernity.” As evidence, she offered that the population went from 13 million to 25 million during Japanese rule; the rice harvest also doubled. In 1910 there were one hundred schools in Korea. By the time the Japanese left, there were 5,960 schools, in which, she added, Korean was taught for the first time. “Before the Japanese, they couldn’t even read or write their own language! Well, only about six percent of them. After thirty-five years [of Japanese occupation], that grew to twenty-two percent.”

This echoed something Tom Gill, the Yokohama anthropologist, had told me: “These far-rightists think that actually Japan did a lot of good things. You can find parallels with *Daily Telegraph* readers in Britain who think we brought civilization to India, built the roads, the trains, the bridges, and so on. It is exactly the same discourse about what Japan did to Korea.”

“No, the Japanese occupation was totally different from the British in India,” counters O. “The Japanese didn’t take anything, almost nothing, from Korea. There was no killing, no murdering or anything like that.” Yes, the Japanese were a bit suppressive-y in the early years of their colonial rule of Korea, she concedes, but they soon loosened up: “The equation of colonialism with evil leaves no room for credit if people’s standards of living actually improved,” she writes in *Getting Over It*, adding that people don’t really care who rules them “as long as their daily lives are not disturbed.”

What of the forced laborers who were taken to the coal mines of Hokkaido? They were “recruited.” And the historians who claim otherwise? O waved her coffee cup dismissively. Many more Korean men wanted to join the Japanese army than were permitted to because the recruiting criteria were too stringent. “Only one in fifty [who applied] could go to war with the Japanese. To join the Japanese army was a very, very good thing for them. They really wanted to join. Okay, toward the end of the war, let’s say 1944, the Japanese government did say, ‘Okay, let them work in the mines or a place like that.’ Kind of dangerous, but this job was well paid compared with other work.” She adds in passing that the Nanjing Massacre was also “a lie. Zero deaths. It didn’t happen. Fake history.”

As we were parting, I asked O Sonfa if she felt her work in any way contributed *positively* to the relationship between Japan and Korea. She can no longer visit her homeland; in 2013 she was turned away after landing at Incheon Airport in Seoul, en route to her mother’s funeral; and she claims the Korean government has blocked publication of her works, so this seemed unlikely, but I was interested to hear what she would say.

“My books have very important contents for both Koreans and Japanese, and for the people in the rest of the world to know the truth. That’s why I am publishing in English too. I will never stop writing this.” Yes, but might it help if she were occasionally a bit more critical about Japan, to balance things a little? “It’s not a question of being critical or not critical of Japan. Many foreigners accuse and criticize Japan by just looking at the surface phenomena.”

I persisted in search of some sign of conciliation. Wasn’t there something that Japan could do to improve relations with Korea? Give them the disputed islands of Takeshima/Dokdo? Further restitution for the comfort women? Stop visiting Yasukuni? “Takeshima belongs to Japan,” she said firmly. “And the Yasukuni shrine has *nothing* to do with Koreans. The comfort women didn’t exist. They were prostitutes. I found out the reality from history.”

So all the other historians around the world were simply wrong, or being paid by China or America? “Yes, America made this history to be taught to the Japanese: ‘The Japanese are bad, we saved the Japanese from

the war, blah, blah, blah.’ Koreans are taught this anti-Japanese ideology. If you talk to Koreans who are over sixty years old, they are more friendly to Japan because they know the Japanese and remember the [colonial] time.” Growing up in Korea, she too had been indoctrinated to hate the Japanese, but when she moved to Japan, she could find no reason for this. She dismissed the black van protestors as “only a few right-wingers. There are neo-Nazis in America or the UK, everywhere, but do you consider them normal Brits or normal Americans? No.” And she claimed never to have experienced even slight anti-Korean prejudice in her time in Japan.

Why would it be in America’s interests to pit two allies in the region against each other? “To make wars one day. This is how they can make money. Behind it, I think they want war between Japan and China.”

“And there are no smart Koreans who have figured out that they are being manipulated this way? You’re the only Korean who knows this?” I asked.

“Not the only one,” she conceded. But one of very few.



Back in Osaka, after visiting the International Peace Center, I make my way across the city to another late-eighties relic, the Osaka Human Rights Museum.

Though housed in a rather more drab, municipal-style building than the prefab-modernist Peace Osaka, the Osaka Human Rights Museum presents a much more progressive, contemporary Japan, an inclusive, concerned, sensitive Japan keen to embrace every marginalized social group and support every cause, from gay rights (good) to nitrogen pollution (bad). There is an anti-bullying section, bits about LGBT rights, and even information about the prejudice people on mechanical ventilators have to endure, of which I was not previously aware.

“Shouldn’t society treat all life in the world as valuable?” asks a poster. Another suggests that “Through the experience of wearing costumes and trying to play the musical instruments of various countries and regions, let’s think about the benefits of learning about various cultures, customs and values and understand and respect each other.” The museum celebrates the

diversity of the Korean community (100,000 to 150,000 Zainichi live in the city, which has a total population of two million), which makes Osaka a place where “you can enjoy learning many different cultures from the Korean Peninsula that have taken root in society.”

It is easy to mock the museum’s happy-clappy tone, but it is also a reminder for me that, as noisy as the right-wing nationalists in Japan can be, and as disturbing and insensitive as the rhetoric of its politicians and writers like O Sonfa is, when it comes to reflecting upon the colonial era, ordinary Japanese people are just as likely to take a more tolerant, open, and progressive approach to ethnic minorities and Japanese history.

Of course, I realize a binary division like this is also reductive; 127 million people can’t simply be divided between those on the right wing who deny Japanese imperial aggression and claim victim status, and those on the left who acknowledge Japan’s war crimes and abhor the treatment of the Zainichi. English academic Philip Seaton argues that we shouldn’t judge the Japanese by the nationalist tendencies of their political leaders and assume that the perfunctory or ambivalent overview of Japanese colonialism given in Japanese history textbooks equates to the view of the war held by most Japanese.

“The longer I live here, the more I realize that the stereotypes are unhelpful when it comes to explaining the diversity within Japan,” says Seaton, who has lived in Japan for more than twenty years. “The default setting inevitably plonks them in the conservative bracket, but I spend a lot of time with civil society activists who spend their summer holidays up to their knees in mud digging up the bones of Korean forced laborers. Are they any less Japanese than the person screaming from a van ‘Smelly Koreans, get out of Japan’? No, they are equally Japanese.”

In his book *Japan’s Contested War Memories*, Seaton examines the common perception outsiders have of the Japanese approach to the war: that they are in denial, haven’t said sorry, are misinformed about the reality of what was done in their name, and fail to hold their government to account—basically, that they need to ‘fess up and be more like the Germans were after World War II. But these perceptions “privilege the actions of officials over public opinion or cultural memory,” he writes, which I take to mean

that we shouldn't judge Japan by the Fascist idiots who run it. He also makes the point that, more often than not, those idiots pay with their jobs when they say idiotic things about the war. There have been many such idiots, like Nagano Shigeto, a justice minister, who in 1994 denied the accepted view of the Nanjing Massacre. He was forced to resign. Or Okuno Seisuke, a member of the cabinet, who in 1988 publicly asked, "In what sense" had Japan been the aggressor in the war? Again, it was a stupid and provocative thing to say, and he was forced to resign. So there are usually consequences.

Conservatives in Japan might steer the state-level discourse on the war, but Seaton believes the general public is probably more progressive and that their "views routinely exceed conservative and nationalistic views in opinion polls. Typically, 50 to 60 percent of people characterize the war as 'aggressive,' while anything between 50 and 80 percent (depending on the precise wording of questions) are either critical of the government's 'inadequate' treatment of war responsibility issues (such as the level of compensation) or are supportive of additional compensation and initiatives acknowledging aggression." It is also worth pointing out that it seems to me the Japanese are better informed about the history of the East Asian war than most Americans or British people.

Just as there are different approaches to interpreting the war, in Japan there are different definitions of patriotism. "If you are right wing, you think being patriotic, loving your country, means hating Koreans," Seaton told me. "But for progressives, loving their country means examining the past, learning from it, and making sure they do something better next time. It's a different sort of love."

Many organizations and individuals in Japan have worked tirelessly to research the truth about the war, including the Violence Against Women in War Network-Japan, which organized the Women's International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery in Tokyo in 2000 (which found Emperor Hirohito and the Japanese military guilty of crimes against humanity); and the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility, a group of progressive academics. Various national groups regularly protest prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni. As long ago as 1972,

well before Korean or Chinese journalists had even begun to examine war history in the public sphere, it was a Japanese journalist, Honda Katsuichi, who first brought to light Japan's World War II atrocities in his book *Travels in China*. Honda is one of countless Japanese journalists who, over the years, have unearthed evidence of Japan's war crimes, their work often being published by *Asahi Shimbun*, Japan's second-largest newspaper. It campaigned on behalf of the Korean comfort women when a Chuo University professor, Yoshimi Yoshiaki, found documents in the Ministry of Defense archives that incriminated the imperial government in its role in organizing the military brothel system. Meanwhile, in the 1980s, the Association of Returnees from China, a group of Japanese military veterans who had spent time in Chinese prisons before being sent home, confessed to numerous, horrendous war crimes lending further credence to the allegations. Meanwhile, in fiction and film, Japanese artists have been confronting the horrors of their compatriots' actions since the epic and harrowing *The Human Condition*, a series of six novels by Gomikawa Junpei, published in the late 1950s and later turned into a film trilogy, about the experiences of an idealist Japanese soldier during and after the war. The late Mizuki Shigeru's powerful autobiographical manga series, *Showa: A History of Japan*, also explored the war era (and aftermath) with unsparing honesty from his perspective as a young recruit fighting in Papua New Guinea.

Just before we had parted in Tokyo, Seaton, who I sensed felt a little exasperated about some of these misconceptions about his adopted homeland (and who looked, incidentally, like a young Kenneth Branagh), had made the point that Japanese views on the war also vary depending on the region. In Hokkaido, where he lives, there is a stronger progressive movement because of the wartime presence of an unusually high number of forced laborers from Korea, who came to work in the coal mines. And sometimes approaches to remembering the war can even differ *within* a region. "If you go to Hiroshima, then the civil societies all revolve around the A-bomb, but even within Hiroshima Prefecture, if you go elsewhere to Okinoshima, it's all about the poison gas, because that's where all the biological weapons used in China were produced. And the number of

people killed by the atomic bomb in Hiroshima was fewer than the number killed [in China] by the poison gas manufactured in Hiroshima Prefecture. You also have the naval town Etajima, where the current Self-Defense Force has a training base, which is still a highly conservative town. So you see, even looking in just one prefecture, the picture is so mixed. It is very complicated.”

HIROSHIMA

As I drive west, first to Kobe to check out the thriving Chinatown there (and its exceptionally dull museum), then onward to Hiroshima, the scenery grows more and more operatic. At a service stop, the air is thick with dragonflies and above, wheeling on the thermals, are eagles the size of hang-gliders. The weather adds its own drama. At one point, after catching a hallucinogenic glimpse of a full-scale replica of Neuschwanstein Castle in the distance from a highway viaduct outside of Tatsuno (I'm guessing another relic of the bubble era), I round a bend and go from blue sky and sunshine into a monstrous deluge. The road now transforms into a river. I can no longer see the end of the car's hood and effectively sail my way down through the mountains to the coast, with occasional glimpses of the Inland Sea in the distance, its surface tiled with oyster farms between a threaded necklace of islets.

For no other reason than that it looked nice online, I am spending the night at a curious Greek-themed (and staffed) hotel. After checking in, I borrow a bicycle for a ride along the coast to decompress. I pass cats lazing on warm stone steps, and tiny crabs scuttle into the brickwork as I ride by. I come to a small bathing beach where, as the sun sets, families are lighting grills for their dinner and flying fish flash out in the bay. The coast road narrows to a single lane as it weaves through depleted fishing communities

with long-shuttered businesses and empty lots choked with knotweed. In some villages the only commerce is a couple of rusty vending machines. Unlike in the big cities where I have spent most of my time so far, the impact of Japan's aging population is very visible here.

Many of the houses along this part of the coast are built from wood that has been deliberately burned, a traditional technique known as *yakisugi*. The charring is supposed to make the wood resistant to fire and, by neutralizing the cellulose, less attractive to insects.

I think of these houses the next day at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum. At the entrance to the museum, an entire wall is covered with a panorama of Hiroshima before the bomb blast, showing an elegant city of timber houses, waterways, and bridges. This is contrasted with a photo of the city a short while after eight fifteen a.m. on August 6, 1945, the moment the first atomic bomb, "Little Boy," was detonated 1,800 feet above Shima Hospital, causing a "beautiful flash of light." The city was incinerated. Tens of thousands of people were killed instantly; an estimated 146,000 died in the subsequent days and weeks. After the mushroom cloud dispersed, the black rain fell. In 2000 a BBC documentary crew interviewed Hiroshima survivors, one of whom recalled looking down at her legs and realizing the water had dissolved her skin:

"I saw many victims, their arms held out in front of them and their skin all peeled off ... There was another man whose upper body had lost all of its skin and all we could see was the red raw flesh."

The museum has many sobering relics—clothing, the charred frame of a child's tricycle. I read how one survivor had to carry his schoolmate because the soles of the boy's feet had burned off. Witnesses recalled the cherry trees ablaze.

Hiroshima was selected as the first target for the United States' new weapon partly because it was a busy military port, but also because the surrounding hills would concentrate the blast of the bomb—as was also the case in Nagasaki. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima used uranium; the larger bomb that fell on Nagasaki used plutonium.

As I am walking around the museum, I notice a member of staff wearing a badge that indicates she is available to answer questions. Her

name is Ikeda Miko. She tells me that her father, now in his early nineties, was born in Hiroshima. He was living in Kyoto when the bomb dropped and arrived back in the city, hoping to help, ten days later. He had lost many of his family members in the blast, so he was astonished to see that his wooden house still stood, albeit minus its roof. His abiding memory, she said, was of the terrible smell that hung over the city.

We talk about the necessity or otherwise of the atomic bombs. Ikeda-san is very much of the opinion that the Americans deployed their atomic weapons to send a message to the Russians, and to justify the cost of the Manhattan Project, but she concedes that there were many military bases in Hiroshima and it was a fair target in that sense; she also says she has heard that the Japanese were working on their own atomic bomb, which, theoretically, could have been dropped on Los Angeles. A couple of years ago, a retired professor from Kyoto University unearthed blueprints for this bomb, along with drawings for a centrifuge for the processing of uranium. It was due to be finished in August 1945, but the Japanese didn't have enough uranium—a Nazi submarine en route to Japan with 1,200 pounds of uranium oxide had been captured by the Americans in May 1945.

The museum describes Japan in 1945 as being in “an extremely weak position” and points out that the Potsdam Declaration, made in July 1945 by the United States, Britain, and China demanding the Japanese surrender, made no mention of the existence of America's atomic weapon. The implication is that had they known about the bombs, the Japanese would have surrendered without the need for their deployment, but this is unlikely. Records show that Emperor Hirohito persisted in his belief that the Americans might still sue for peace on terms favorable to Japan even *after* the Hiroshima bombing. The decision to surrender was eventually his, and he claimed in his surrender speech that he was sacrificing himself to prevent the total extinction of mankind. After he renounced his divinity, the emperor was very careful to minimize his role in the conflict. “Dissembling until the end” is how his American biographer Herbert Bix puts it.

The Allies, General Douglas MacArthur in particular, were perfectly willing to help Hirohito cover his tracks. They needed Japan back on its feet to face the threat of the Soviets and, finding the post-surrender Japanese to

be remarkably cooperative, believed there was little to be gained by bringing the emperor to justice. (“He is a symbol which unites all Japan,” concluded MacArthur. “Destroy him and the nation will disintegrate.”) The Allies were also aware of the effects the severe terms of the Treaty of Versailles had had upon Germany following World War I. A war guilt aspect had been included in those terms, which helped foster the economic and social conditions in which Nazism incubated so virulently. But Hirohito’s immunity from prosecution in the Tokyo Trial of 1946 is still used by the Koreans and Chinese as evidence that the Japanese never fully acknowledged their own culpability. The man in whose name the war was waged, and who was not only fully informed of what was happening but often encouraged Japan’s imperialist expansion, was never tried, never confessed, and died of natural causes forty-four years after the war ended.

As with the Osaka International Peace Center, the Hiroshima museum offers little of this kind of context. There are a couple of sentences about how the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 helped turn Hiroshima into an important military base, and it is clearly stated that Japan started the Pacific War against the Americans, but when it comes to Japan’s broader actions in Asia, the language is often strangely passive: “The Manchurian Incident of 1931 escalated to a full-scale war with China in 1937,” it tells us. It also refers to “the incident known as the ‘Nanjing Massacre’ [in which] the Chinese sacrifice included soldiers, POWs, civilians and even children,” which is a curious way to describe Japan’s most notorious war crime. The reference to Korean slave labor is similarly opaque, stating merely that Koreans were “being conscripted to serve the war. Many were assigned to factories in Hiroshima.” Around thirty thousand Koreans died in the blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (another hundred thousand died, all told, as a result of war-related service as military conscripts and so forth).

As I left Hiroshima that evening, of course my mind was reeling from the horrors of which I had been reminded, but I was also trying to understand the city’s approach to the subject of the war, and Japan’s role in it. The people who run the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum and its environs argue that its purpose is to memorialize the dead, not to explore the context of the war or to apportion blame. The focus is thus on

the child victims and the elderly; the epicenter of the blast, one plaque tells us, was mostly popular playground areas, as well as temples where turtles and carp swam in ponds (i.e., not munitions factories). But it is this kind of emphasis on the civilian suffering that led one commentator to refer to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park as Japan's "national shrine of victimhood."

There is no question that the Japanese people *were* victims. They were victims of massive bombing campaigns by the Americans. They were victims of an out-of-control military elite that brutalized young recruits and led over two million to their deaths. After the war, the country was shocked by the plight of the half million Japanese prisoners captured in Northern China by Soviet forces and held for years in Siberian labor camps. They too were victims.

Philip Seaton wrote *Japan's Contested War Memories* about how the Japanese reflect on the war today. He told me that this victim narrative is dominant in the mainstream media in Japan and often "avoids explicit reference to Japanese war responsibility." He cites the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park as complicit in this, and mentions the country's most popular TV series about the war, *Oshin* (1982), and most popular war movie, *The Burmese Harp* (1985), both of which emphasize the Japanese-as-victims aspect.

Japan's victim status has been further burnished with a kind of unimpeachable piety thanks to its strict postwar pacifism as laid out in Article 9 of the constitution imposed by the Allied occupying force in 1946. This continues to stipulate that the Japanese people "forever renounce war as a sovereign right" and that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." Pacifism does seem to be deeply ingrained in the character of contemporary Japanese people—hence perhaps those two-fingered peace signs Japanese people make when they are photographed (although the origins of that are unknown). Many in Japan are justifiably proud of their non-militarism. "Renouncing war, not killing people, not being killed—this may be an ideal, but this may be the greatest thing that Japan has achieved," Yasuda Koichi, the news reporter whom I met in the Korean quarter of Tokyo, told me. "This beautiful Article Nine.

We have made automobiles and electronic products, we have created many things, but to the extent that I am a proud patriot, it is because of Article Nine.” He would, he said, protect it with his very being.

It was one of the most moving sentiments, and the best defense of Japan’s pacifist constitution, that I have heard. His views are far from unusual. Polls tend to show Japan pretty evenly divided on revising the constitution and turning the Self-Defense Forces into a military capable of “belligerence,” perhaps one day even equipped with nuclear weapons. Usually there is a slight majority against changing the constitution (56 percent in a July 2019 poll), and only around 30 percent actively want change. Pretty remarkable, given that Kim Jong-un keeps firing missiles in Japan’s direction.

According to surveys, the Japanese are also the least patriotic people, not only of all Asian nations, but possibly in the *world*. The World Values Survey of 2010 revealed that the Japanese have the lowest percentage of people who are “proud of their country” (24 percent) of all the nationalities polled, with only 16 percent willing to fight for it. Similarly, an Asia Barometer survey revealed only 27 percent of Japanese were “proud of their own nationality,” compared to 46 percent of Chinese.

As Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder put it in their book, *The Japan–South Korea Identity Clash*, “Abe may hanker for a more conservative Japan, but the public is not likely to follow him.” Despite this apparent lack of a mandate from the people, his government recently passed bills allowing for “proactive pacifism,” and in May 2017 gave the deadline of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics for “reinterpreting” Article 9 and giving the prime minister an additional role as the country’s commander-in-chief. Japan already has a larger navy than Britain and France combined, as well as 1,004 aircraft and 250,000 military personnel, and in April 2018, the country took another step toward full militarization when its first marine unit since the war was activated in Sasebo, near Nagasaki, specifically to counter fears of Chinese attacks on Japanese islands.

So why is Japan’s government so gung-ho while its people are more equivocal? Like the rest of us, the Japanese often have to accept ugly or contrary opinions in their elected representatives: indeed, a 2017 poll

revealed that 65 percent of Japanese people support no political party. Tom Gill, the Yokohama-based anthropologist, believes that Abe is in power largely because of the promises he made to shore up the Japanese economy: “Yes, you’ve got this right-wing prime minister who has won two big elections, but it’s not because people agree with him that Japan should return to some sort of prewar, emperor-centered military state. To that I would say, first of all, it is only eight years ago that Japan elected a much more progressively minded political party, with a landslide. Are we supposed to think that the Japanese suddenly became first very right wing, then very left, then very right again? Obviously not. It’s still the same Japanese people. It’s just that they get pissed off with crappy politicians and boot them out.”

“Really, people don’t vote for Abe, but they vote for his party,” one Japanese friend explained to me. “The opposition is also very weak.”

It is true, from what I’ve seen of them, that Japan’s opposition parties do seem uncommonly prone to implosion at inopportune moments—usually a couple of weeks before a general election. I would almost say it was intentional, if I were the type who believed in conspiracy theories ...

FUKUOKA

I have two reasons for coming to Fukuoka. First, this is the only way to get to South Korea without flying, and I have some romantic idea that I must do this journey the slow way. A ferry departs daily from Hakata Port (Fukuoka and Hakata are two cities conjoined into one) to Busan, South Korea's second-largest city, on the southeast tip of the country. Second: Fukuoka is home to one of Japan's most popular far-right YouTubers, Ishii Yoko, née Mada (she was married some months after our interview), better known as Random Yoko.

This tall, slim thirty-two-year-old had recently popped up on the international media's radar on account of her pro-Trump videos, recorded in English, as many of her videos are, in her customary chatty, light-hearted style. It seemed an odd situation—a young Japanese woman falling for a seventy-year-old orange demagogue—but Yoko obviously sympathized with Trump's distrust of the international political orthodoxy and hatred of mainstream media.

Those who explore her YouTube channel further will discover, among other things, a young woman with a unique musical talent. Yoko has recorded countless synth ballads of her own composing, featuring energetic keyboard playing and her distinctive vocal stylings.

She was born in Fukuoka in 1985, but went to university in Osaka, which, as mentioned previously, has the largest Korean population in Japan. These days she is vehemently anti-Korea; indeed, she has written various offensive songs about the Korean comfort women and the colonial period. Though these are not obvious subjects for power ballads, Yoko makes her lyrics fit the form in much the same way a toddler wedges wrong shapes into wrong holes. For instance, her song about the colonial “benevolence” of Japan toward Korea talks about how the Japanese gave them “massive railways, clean streets, water, and sewer services,” also managing to shoehorn in references to “libraries, factories, including nitrogen fertilizer factories.”

(I don’t imagine so many songs have referenced nitrogen fertilizer factories, at least not since the collapse of the Soviet Union.)

Yoko posted her first YouTube video in 2006. In 2011 she won the inaugural YouTube NextUp newcomers award. Her YouTube channel has had more than 6.5 million views. Her comfort women-themed rap (sample lyric: “Slaves don’t get paid, do they even smile. Where were Korean men when they were supposed to be crying?”) has 650,000 views. And she is fast making her name on Japanese TV as a right-wing commentator.

I meet Yoko in Fukuoka Station and we adjourn to a nearby café, where she explains her beginnings as an internet star. It all began four years ago, when she quit her office job. She tells me that she was going through a rough time with her health and some personal problems. Yoko talks in a garbled rush but in good English; her face is expressive; she is good company. “At the same time, in 2012, in the fall I believe, I started to get interested in politics, because I got time to think as I kind of broke up with my boyfriend.” It was around this time that the dispute between Japan and China over the ownership of the Senkaku Islands flared up with those violent anti-Japanese protests in Beijing.

“At the time I didn’t know anything about politics and I was, like, ‘Why are they so angry and smashing up their stuff?’ and so I asked my father about it.” Yoko describes her father, an English teacher, as a conservative, not politically active, but with lots of books on politics, which she began to devour. “I used to hate politics because I could study maths or physics and I

know that I could master it, but when it comes to politics I thought, ‘That’s never something that I will ever understand.’” I take this acceptance of the lack of absolutes in politics as a positive sign. I am wrong.

“I used to hate my own country before I got interested in politics because I was taught that Japan was the bad guy in history. So I start to read my father’s books and I start to read what really happened in the past, and how the disputes [with China and Korea] were fabricated, based on the strategy of the Chinese Communist Party without ANY EVIDENCE.” Heads are now turning in the café. “Basically, the big idea is, they want to speak badly about Japanese people so that the American people lose trust in us, and start fighting against us.”

This, then, is why the Koreans and Chinese are apparently taught from school age that, as Yoko puts it, “Japanese are evil.” It is all part of a conspiracy between the Chinese Communist Party and socialist teachers in the United States. After the war, Yoko says, traditional Japanese family values were destroyed because the Americans encouraged the building of small apartments, isolating people and severing family bonds, and implementing unnatural gender equality (this last is a particularly laughable claim).

“Men and women are different. A lot of females are stupid.”

“So are a lot of men,” I venture.

“But, like, in a different way.”

“So you wouldn’t describe yourself as a feminist?”

“I am a true feminist. And men are weak. What I mean is, females are good at talking and interrupting, or playing with kids and that kind of stuff. But they are not really good with mathematics.”

I should stress that Yoko imbues these kinds of statements with a good deal of humor, but I do think she means them. She admits that she does get into trouble sometimes with her family for the things she says. Her brother, a banker, was told by his boss not to talk about his sister in front of clients.

What, I wondered, were some of the other untruths she was taught at school?

“That we did the Nanjing Massacre. We had to write it in exams, so I was really shocked when I learned that it was actually a fabrication.”

“Okay, so that’s *not* a fabrication, Yoko,” I reply.

“Well, there was a Nanjing ‘incident,’ but it was *not* a massacre. Only, like, fifty-something people [were killed].”

“Fifty thousand?”

“No. Fifty.”

I ask for her evidence. She says it is hard to show evidence for something that didn’t happen, which I suppose has a kind of twisted logic. Except that, though we will probably never know the exact death toll that resulted from the Japanese army’s occupation of the then capital of China in 1937, there is plenty of evidence that many tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of Chinese were killed by the Japanese in Nanjing. Yoko disputes the historians, citing the pictures of happy crowds welcoming the Japanese invaders, which do exist and which you can see on right-wing websites. The diaries written by Westerners who were witnesses to the atrocities, which are also cited by historians as evidence, have apparently been tampered with, she says. Japan was not the aggressor in World War II. The Japanese were fighting communism, just as the United States continued to do in the postwar years. As for Korea, it was colonized by Japan, but there was no oppression of the Koreans, and many Koreans were in charge of things. “We taught them their own language, we gave so much, we could have destroyed everything when we left. We only wanted Korea strong. And in China, that place wasn’t Chinese territory, it was like, a blank area.” She is talking about Manchuria, originally home of the Qing dynasty, which had ruled China for over two centuries.

I ask her how she is able to deny the generally accepted historical evidence with such confidence. “Mmm, it’s like, for example, if you’re in school and the majority of your classmates are bashing one kid, but this one kid is saying the truth.”

“That’s not really a good analogy, Yoko, because they are not experts who have studied bashing kids all their lives and have degrees in it, you know what I mean?” I reply.

“But they’re bashing.”

“But what about the experts who have studied these things, made it their life’s work?”

We continue like this for some time, me advocating experts, Yoko telling me the experts are in the pocket of the communists who want to divide Asia and America. “Experts,” she exhales at one point. “They couldn’t even see that Trump was gonna be president. Some people go online, but they get the wrong information, with no evidence.”

In one of Yoko’s lighter videos, she complains about the appropriation of Japanese culture by the South Koreans, claiming that their tourist information films include references to sumo wrestling and sushi, implying they were Korean inventions. I ask her what her source was for this. Was it actually an *official* South Korean tourist board promotion? She isn’t too sure, she says. But if she isn’t sure about the source, how can she accuse the Koreans of appropriating Japanese culture? And, besides, didn’t the Japanese do precisely this in the 1960s—and the 1890s, come to that, when they visited the West to learn the secrets of the Industrial Revolution?

“But that was technology. The Koreans are stealing our culture, like the martial arts and that kind of stuff, and saying they are the origin, and that’s just wrong.” The Koreans could be happy, enjoy their success, and have harmonious relations with Japan she says, but they choose to be angry, they choose to perpetuate the disputes over colonial atrocities, useless islands, slave labor, comfort women, and so on.

I wonder how Yoko feels about the booming Chinese and Korean tourist industry in her hometown of Fukuoka. Surely it is a good thing—both economically, and in terms of providing the Japanese and their neighbors with firsthand experience of one another?

“There are Chinese and Koreans everywhere.” Yoko shakes her head. “Yeah, the money is good, and we have encouraged them, and it is good that, though they have been taught that the Japanese are evil, they can see us for themselves, that Japan is actually a great country, and they can take back that knowledge with them to their home country and spread it. It’s not all bad. But I feel like this city has been taken over.”

Back when she was at university in Osaka, Yoko used to have several foreign and Zainichi friends. Not anymore. “My foreign friends started to attack me, call me stupid and racist.” After she posted her most watched film to-date, the comfort woman-themed rap, she even started to receive

death threats. She ignores them, she says. Her new fame will protect her. “If I die or something, they’re gonna be in trouble.” And, she says, she has won new Japanese friends to replace the foreigners.

Based on the lyrics to her pro-Yasukuni song (“The winners hanged those men for fighting for us”), I had assumed that Yoko was an Abe Shinzo voter. But this is not the case. She votes for the Nippon no Kokoro, an anti-immigration party originally founded by Ishihara Shintaro, the former governor of Tokyo, who in an interview with *Playboy* in 1990 claimed the Nanjing Massacre was a fabrication by the Chinese. He has also described the occupation of Korea as being justified, and once said that “old women who live after they have lost their reproductive function are useless and are committing a sin.” There’s more, but you get the gist.

“People think we are extreme right or whatever,” Yoko tells me. “But though it looks like we are on the right, it’s the rest of the world that’s on the left.” That includes Prime Minister Abe, the man who wants to rearm Japan. The man who pays his respects to war criminals. The man whose deputy prime minister, Aso Taro, once asked, “Why don’t we learn how to do constitutional reform from the Nazis?” But Yoko feels Abe is compromising too much with Japan’s neighbors.

As our time together draws to a close, I ask about her future plans. There was not much money to be made from YouTube, she says. “What I have learned from Trump is, I need to be rich.” She intends to achieve this by being a motivational speaker. As for a move into mainstream politics, that would be too restricting—“You have to always choose your words.”

Yoko and I say goodbye. She is heading back home to her parents’ house, where she still lives. Just before we part, she tells me she suffered from depression for a long time. Now she has the same complaint that forced Abe Shinzo to terminate his first stint as prime minister in 2007: irritable bowel syndrome. “I have so much power, but I try not to hurt people. I get hurt, and it goes to my gut.”

I leave Japan on the ferry to Busan, troubled by Yoko’s blithe historical revisionism and xenophobia, but also worried for her personally and for her country. If she does represent the views of anything like the number of

people who watch her videos, then Japan does seem to be heading down a very dark path indeed.

THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

BUSAN

In the months prior to my arrival, events taking place in Korea have dominated the global news headlines. All eyes are on the peninsula. I feel like I am setting sail to the center of the world.

It had all begun in late 2016 when South Korea's then president, Park Geun-hye, daughter of the country's late military dictator, Park Chung-hee, embroiled herself in a picaresque scandal involving a mystical guru, Danish equestrians, and millions in bribes from Samsung. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans took to the streets of Seoul in protest, the crisis eventually ending with Park in prison, which seemed to make everyone happy.

In the meantime, America had installed its Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system on a golf course south of Seoul, much to the irritation of Beijing. The system was ostensibly intended to protect the region against North Korean missiles, but the Chinese interpreted it as a threat and promptly imposed unofficial sanctions on South Korea. The result was an almost instant and drastic fall in tourism and trade between China and South Korea. More recently, North Korea had mounted long-range missile tests in the direction of Japan (and, in theory, the United States), prompting excitable conjecture that World War III was about to break out.

As I arrive in the Republic of Korea, to give South Korea its proper name, the election to choose Park's successor is about to take place, prompting yet more international headlines. The hot favorite is Moon Jae-in of the Democratic Party. He is promising a more conciliatory approach to North Korea, and to revive the country's vulnerable economy, which many feel is being fatally undermined by the all-powerful chaebol, South Korea's rather sinister family-run conglomerates, which include Samsung and Hyundai.

All this has pushed relations with Korea's former colonial ruler, Japan, slightly down the agenda, but the old resentments—the 1910–1945 occupation and slave labor, including the comfort women; the Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute; Japanese history textbooks; and Yasukuni—are never far from the surface.

I want to get a sense of how the Koreans regard these issues on a day-to-day basis, away from the headlines and political posturing, and to better understand the historical relationship of these two countries in general. Above all, I just want to see as much of Korea, and meet as many Koreans, as possible.

For all the noise it generates, and though it is home to over 51 million people, South Korea is surprisingly small. In theory, I could drive straight to Seoul, the capital in the north of the country, in about four hours on the highway, but I plan to spend a couple of days in Busan on the south coast before heading west to Mokpo and Gwangju, then driving up the west coast. After an initial visit to Seoul, I am going to head over to the east coast, and then north to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the border with North Korea, before returning to spend some more time in the capital.

Already, as I wait in the departure terminal at Fukuoka port, I note some key differences between Koreans and the Japanese. The latter stand in line long before the embarkation time, but the Korean passengers have no patience for that. They have a nifty method for avoiding the tedium of queuing: they simply let their luggage do it for them, placing their suitcases in front of or behind the Japanese passengers while they pop off for some last-minute duty-free shopping. This seems to suggest a unique combination of high social trust and blithe entitlement. Interesting.

Three hours later, having arrived in Busan (formerly Pusan), following a ferry ride that passes in what is, for me, the usual anti-seasickness medicine-induced anesthetic fog, the contrasts between the two near-neighbors are thrown into starker relief by the taxi to my hotel.

Japanese taxi drivers are courteous, efficient, law-abiding, and careful. Often they wear genteel white gloves. They always know the way or stop to ask people if they do not. My first Korean taxi driver is a bit different. He shoots off from the ferry terminal as if he has just heard that the North is invading. Though I am staying in a large and prominent hotel right on the seafront, he has not the faintest clue where it is located and looks at the map on my phone as if seeing hieroglyphics for the first time. South Korea is said to boast a 99 percent literacy rate, the highest in the world (this is where moveable print type was invented, by the way, two hundred years before Gutenberg), and their sixteen-to-nineteen-year-olds are the most literate and numerate in the OECD.

Eventually I am deposited at my lodgings, but the bracing introduction to Korean service culture continues at the restaurant in Eel Alley where I dine that evening. The waitress, a tiny, scowling woman in a flowery apron, brings me a laminated picture menu featuring many intriguing-looking dishes. I mull over my options and choose a dish, but the waitress snatches the menu from me, opens it at a different page, and jabs her finger at one of the pictures while looking away over her shoulder and talking to another member of staff. Apparently, this—a bowl of something red—is what I will be eating this evening. I try to point at something on a different page—call me predictable, I fancy some eel—but she closes the menu on my hand.

It is now, as I wait for my bowl of red, that I notice for the first time the most striking quotidian difference between Korea and Japan: in Korea they use metal chopsticks. I have never once encountered metal chopsticks in Japan, but in South Korea they are the norm; wooden chopsticks are very rare. Metal ones are much heavier and more slippery, though. They render my chopstick skills, honed-to-average over decades, virtually void, which is confusing and humiliating. Sharing food from a communal pot or hot plate is major feature of Korean dining—some would say of the Koreans' collective emotional landscape—so there is nowhere to hide if you can't

handle your chopsticks properly: what's more, your clumsy fumbles involve other people's food as well as your own. The chopsticks also make my right hand ache. I will grow to hate them during my time in South Korea and ponder this schism a good deal. The main reason cited by Koreans for metal sticks is cost-effectiveness. They can be washed and reused, while wooden chopsticks must be disposed of. After the Korean War, the country was broken economically and almost completely deforested, making wood scarce, but Japan had a fairly rough time economically in the late 1940s too, and South Korea's economy has developed at an unprecedented rate in the last few decades. Why still with the metal chopsticks?

Busan is ranged around a series of bays, harbors, and crescent-shaped beaches, a bit like Rio de Janeiro. It also feels a tad Brazilian, or at least less uptight than Japan. This is both good (I worry less about being a clumsy oaf, as I do constantly in Japan) but also not so good. I am trying to be diplomatic here, but aesthetics, at least in the public sphere, do not seem to be so much a priority for the people of South Korea's second city. The rash of cheap laser-printed signage on shops and businesses makes everything look like a fried chicken joint, for instance. Everywhere cranes scratch at the skyline, adding to the forest of forty-story tower blocks, none of which appear to have detained their architects at the drawing board for very long.

I take in a panorama of the city the next morning from the United Nations Memorial Cemetery, a rare green oasis up on a plateau. The cemetery contains the remains of a few hundred of the 37,000 United Nations soldiers who died during the Korean War in 1950 to 1953. As we've heard, the war was a result of the vacuum left when the Japanese were turfed out of the Korean Peninsula following their defeat in 1945. But let's rewind a little: How had Korea become so weak that it was unable to repel the Japanese in the first place?

From the late fourteenth century up until the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, the peninsula was ruled by the descendants of a single dynasty, founded by the king who had kicked the Mongolians out. Not all these monarchs were wise, just, and fair—in fact, several seem to have been borderline insane—and toward the end of the 1800s the country was being

run by “incompetent aristocrats and corrupt rulers who lost their nation to thieves,” as *Pachinko* author Min Jin Lee puts it.

Japan invaded Korea twice in the late 1590s (more on that in a moment), but by the nineteenth century, it was a fear of Western colonial powers that had turned Korea into the so-called Hermit Kingdom, closed to the world as Japan had been. Following the Meiji Restoration and Japan’s military and technological rise, Korea added its next-door neighbor to its list of threatening nations, and when in 1875 the Japanese imposed their own unequal treaty upon the Koreans, just as the Americans had done to Japan, it marked the beginning of a stealth annexation of the entire peninsula via trade-related infrastructure investments—a port reclamation here, a railroad there, and so on.

The Qing Chinese, upset at seeing a vassal state invaded, responded by sending in troops. The subsequent first Sino-Japanese War was not much more than a skirmish, but ended in 1895 with Japan victorious, claiming Taiwan from China as booty, along with the Liaodong Peninsula, a strategically crucial piece of territory jutting down from China into the Yellow Sea to the west of Korea. Japan’s 1905 defeat of Russia—a war also fought in part for control of Korea—was a more seismic shock from a global perspective; it was the first time an Asian power had defeated a Western one on the battlefield. After that, Japan eased itself into full control of Korea as if slowly lowering itself into a hot bath.

The Japanese spun their 1910 annexation of Korea as the beginning of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a supposedly mutually beneficial, pan-regional project to modernize and drive the Western powers from the continent. Many years later, Sun Yat-sen, China’s first republican president, would give credence to the scheme: “We regarded that Russian defeat [in 1905] by Japan as the defeat of the West by the East. We regarded the Japanese victory as our own victory.” Today, many Japanese still defend their actions in these terms. Korea was unstable and vulnerable to Russia or China, with Britain, the United States, and even France ready to pounce. As one German military tactician put it at the time, Korea was “like a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan”—ominous geographical *feng shui* that Tokyo felt needed addressing.

During the 1930s the Korean Peninsula would become a vital source of food, minerals, and manpower for the expanding Japanese empire; by 1944 more than 15 percent of the population of Korea was living in Japan, and at the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Japan's colonial grasp of Korea tightened further. The teaching of its language and history was replaced by Japan's in order to "annihilate the Korean spirit," as the history museum I visit in Busan puts it. The Japanese built hundreds of Shinto shrines, closed Korean language newspapers, and made it a requirement (though some Japanese argue it was voluntary) for all Koreans to take a Japanese name, an especially bitter pill because of Korea's strong culture of clan names. Whether forced or not, by the end of the war, 84 percent of Koreans had done so.

Many Koreans volunteered for the Japanese military not least because, if you wanted to be sure of a full belly, you had to fight.¹ Initially, most volunteers were rejected by the Japanese. That began to change when Japan declared all-out war on China in 1937, but it was only in the last year of World War II that the Japanese military, desperate for manpower to fight off the Americans, initiated forced conscription of Koreans.

Later in my trip, in Seoul, I asked British journalist Michael Breen, who has lived in Korea for decades and is the author of *The New Koreans*, one of the best—and the most enjoyable—books about postwar Korea, how the Japanese occupation was perceived these days. He told me the Koreans are still taught that they were brutally exploited, their farmland was seized, rice stolen, that "everything Japanese was bad ... the assimilation policy was a form of genocide." But he also pointed out that "the Japanese did not interrupt any development plans when they took over." In his experience, the older generation of Koreans, those who lived through occupation, were not as virulently anti-Japanese as the current generation.

This was odd, because generally, the younger Koreans I would speak to on my travels accused the *older* generation of perpetuating the hatred. The younger Koreans loved Japan, visited it as often as they could, and wanted Korea to become, if anything, more Japanese. Which all rather begged the question, do the Koreans really hate Japan? If it's not the younger generation, or the older folks, which Koreans are we talking about?

MOKPO

I leave Busan after a couple of days spent visiting museums and being told what to eat by waitresses, and head west to Mokpo, just over three hours' drive away.

It is mildly discombobulating to go from a right-hand-drive car in Japan to a left-hand-drive one here, and my fellow road users appear to have little patience with my adjustment phase. Korean drivers are noticeably pushier, less inclined to use signals, or really just give more of a shit than their peers in Japan. I had read in an online guide that on Korean roads, larger, more expensive cars take precedence, but this does not seem to apply to me even though I am driving a Kia Stinger, a dressy new four-door sedan, which I have been assured is the epitome of South Korean technological advancement.

At my hotel I take a few minutes to acquaint myself with the car's features. It has plenty, including eight gears, which is three too many. As the journey progresses, I will discover the Stinger has other marvels, including a wireless phone-charging system, which is something I only thought existed in TED Talks, and "smart cruise control," which maintains a safe distance between me and the car in front of me (although Korean road users tend to disagree with what constitutes a "safe" distance and force their way into whatever gap the car leaves). But the biggest eye-opener is

that the Kia is self-driving. I had no idea this was already a thing, and for the first hundred miles of highway I do my best to ignore the strange tugging sensation I occasionally feel through the steering wheel, until, finally, purely on a hunch, I let go of the steering while doing about 70 miles per hour on a bend, and, eerily, the car guides itself. This is very exciting, but after a few seconds, a warning sign lights up: “Driver’s Grasp Not Detected.” *Well, it wasn’t me that installed hands-free driving, I think. Make up your mind.* I re-take the wheel, but over time, this feature does come in extremely useful for the opening of packets of snacks while on the move, specifically chocolate peanut mochi cakes, which have a nasty habit of exploding melty pieces of chocolate all over me and thus require me to have both hands free.

On the outskirts of Busan, as I drive in the shadow of crowded ranks of numbered pastel-pink tower blocks, I find myself pondering: *Why do I find those numbers so soul-crushing? Ordinary houses have numbers, why should I feel differently about forty-story apartment blocks? The Orwellian-ness, I guess. The fact that you would need to number something so colossal which, ordinarily, by dint of its sheer scale, should be easy to identify, yet in the presence of so many others of a similar size is rendered quotidian to the point of anonymity.* I am jolted from my thoughts by a sudden, piercing alarm.

At first, I assume something is drastically wrong with the car, but all systems seem to be functioning. I realize that the noise is coming from my phone. I let the car drive for a moment as I take a look. It seems to be some kind of text alert, but it is in Korean. To what is it alerting me? Nuclear war? Invasion? Earthquake? Chocolate crumbs? I have no idea.

I stop at a gas station in the hope of finding an answer. Not to go on about this kind of thing, but in Japanese service stations, almost before your car comes to a halt, a team of men will descend upon you, pulling the windshield wipers away, sponging down the spotless glass regardless, and filling the tank before saluting you on your way and refusing any offer of a gratuity. In Korea, things are a little different. The pump attendant might grudgingly saunter over in his grubby overalls and eventually get around to filling your car up, then wait for a tip. This one asks me what kind of fuel I

want, and I have to confess that I have no idea. Dilithium crystals? He gives me a withering look and fills it up anyway. Afterward, I mime-ask for his interpretation of the message on my phone. He glances at it and tells me it has been warning me of the outside temperature, which has exceeded safety levels.

The heat—the kind that makes the air wobble—presumably explains the ghost-town feel on the streets of Mokpo, a port at the far southwestern corner of South Korea, where I am to spend the night. There is not a single pedestrian to be seen.

I had read that Mokpo is one of the few places that has kept its Japanese colonial-era architecture, and over the course of the afternoon I track down a few of the sturdy, Western-style Meiji buildings—former banks, mostly. They are not difficult to spot. Everything else in Mokpo looks as if it has been built down to a price, and again, the commercial signage smothers business frontages in a screaming jumble of Day-Glo acrylic, like architectural psoriasis.

I walk up Yudal Mountain, a hill in the center of the town, and the location of the main attraction as far as old Japanese buildings go. Originally the Japanese consulate, this large, redbrick villa, built in 1897, became the town hall when the Japanese left and is now its museum. It paints a fairly balanced picture of the colonial era, making it clear that the Japanese stole land and exploited workers, but also pointing out that they built the first hospital in the city and that the population of Mokpo increased during the Japanese occupation. It even allows that the town was “flourishing” in the 1930s, with major urbanization projects and a railway, although it does say that this was in order to help the “plundering” of rice for the Japanese market.

Returning outside to the baking heat, I follow signs to an air raid shelter dug into the side of the mountain by Korean slave laborers during Japanese rule. Inside the cool subterranean tunnels, the laborers are represented by eerie white statues of skinny men in loincloths being beaten with batons by Japanese soldiers.

I walk farther up the hillside to take in the view of Mokpo Harbor and the outlying islands. At the top of the hill is a statue of the sixteenth-century

naval leader Admiral Yi Sun-shin, clad in armadillo-like armor. The monument is a reminder that long before the twentieth-century occupation, these waters had witnessed another epochal battle between the Koreans and the Japanese when Toyotomi Hideyoshi's army attempted two invasions of the peninsula in 1592 and 1597, collectively known as the Imjin War.

The samurai Toyotomi Hideyoshi had unified Japan, rid the country of its troublesome Christians, and now had his sights set on an empire. What better way to foster a new spirit of national unity than to attack the neighbors? China was his ultimate goal, but he began by invading Korea, reaching Seoul and destroying a great deal of the city. This was quite a shock to the Koreans, who, up until that point, had very much seen themselves as the superior culture in the Confucian hierarchy, with the Japanese, considered barbarians primarily because of their geographical distance from the Middle Kingdom, at the bottom. The Imjin War was largely remembered in Japan for the skilled Korean craftsmen who were among the fifty thousand or so prisoners taken to Japan during the invasions. Kyushu, the main Japanese island closest to Korea, is still famed for its Arita and Satsuma pottery, the techniques for which were introduced by Korean prisoners. The Koreans cite this as evidence that they were the superior race at the time.

The Imjin War was a huge conflict even in global terms, yet I suspect relatively few people outside the two countries are aware of it. Over a million Koreans, almost a third of the population, are believed to have died during the fighting, making the war the most devastating event in the nation's history until the civil war from 1950 to 1953.

"Hell cannot be in some other place apart from this," wrote a Japanese Buddhist monk who witnessed a massacre at Namwon in Jeolla Province in southwestern Korea during the second invasion of the Imjin War. He saw children slaughtered, their mothers killed, and the able-bodied taken off as slaves, secured in bamboo collars. To this day, these kinds of atrocities are considered by some Koreans to be indicative of the latent barbarity of the Japanese, of that essential inhumanity: this is what they do when given the opportunity.

Although the final defeat of the Japanese was mostly thanks to the help of Chinese forces and the (un)timely death of Hideyoshi in 1598, the Koreans prefer to emphasize the exploits of Admiral Yi, the greatest hero in their military history. Even beyond Korea, among those who know about this kind of thing he is considered one of the greatest naval tacticians of all time. Yi was a scourge of the Japanese in over twenty-three battles, all of which he won. Up here on the hill above Mokpo, legend has it that Yi fooled the advancing Japanese navy into believing he and his men had a far greater stock of weapons than they really had by covering some rocks at the top of the hill with straw. The Japanese withdrew, believing the rocks were piles of weapons. Hence the statue.

Admiral Yi's many similar against-all-odds exploits are still regularly recalled in Korean movies and TV dramas, and he also features on the 100 won coin. His life is a rip-roarer. At the height of his military success, Yi was imprisoned and tortured on the orders of the Korean king (he had disobeyed some flawed orders), and demoted to the rank of infantryman. But just as the Japanese were on the verge of winning, he was reinstated. Re-taking command of the thirteen remaining Korean ships and using all his famed cunning, he defeated a Japanese fleet of over three hundred craft at the Battle of Myeongnyang. He died in 1598 at Noryang, during the final battle against the Japanese.

Every war museum I visit in South Korea has a replica of one of Yi's famous Turtle Ships—the armored rowing boats he used to defeat the Japanese. Whenever I saw one of these replicas, I would try to think of an equivalent figure from British history, a military leader who is still regarded with such respect. Does Francis Drake figure prominently, or at all, in the consciousness of teenage Brits? I think not. Then again, perhaps he would if the Spanish had landed and done the things to the English that the Japanese did to the poor Koreans ...

BUAN

The next morning I head north from Mokpo in search of some severed noses. I have very little to go on, not least as the noses I seek are over four hundred years old and have traveled very far.

In Hideyoshi's day it was normal practice for the Japanese to sever the heads of their enemies after a battle to use as evidence to collect a bounty to be paid on each one killed, but so many Koreans were slaughtered during his army's invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597 that shipping their heads back to Japan proved a logistical challenge. The ingenious Japanese came up with a solution: as a contemporary observer put it, "Men and women, down to newborn infants, all were wiped out, none was left alive. Their noses were sliced off and pickled in salt."

The Japanese kept meticulous records that show they took the noses of over 214,000 Koreans and Chinese, mostly in the southern and western Korean provinces of Gyeongsang, Chungcheong, and here, where I am, in Jeolla. The noses were pickled in barrels of salt to preserve them on their journey home for the "head"count and, once in Japan, were displayed to the public as a warning to anyone else who might have been planning to cause trouble, before being buried in specially built tombs. The main nose tomb was dedicated on September 28, 1597, in Kyoto, then the capital of Japan.

To add confusion to an already distressing story, over the years, as they lay beneath their grass-covered hillock in Kyoto, close to a temple later dedicated to Hideyoshi himself, the noses were instead referred to as ears. One theory is that over the centuries, the Japanese became a little self-conscious about what they'd done, and for some reason cutting off ears sounded slightly less cruel than severing noses. In the 1960s a plaque offering a little historical context was also installed by the mound. It read: "One cannot say that cutting off noses was so atrocious by the standard of the time." Indeed, Japanese right-wingers still defend these grisly trophies by pointing out that similar incidents have been committed by victorious soldiers throughout history. The Japanese also claimed that the nose tombs were a symbol of their respect for the deceased spirits of their adversaries, but obviously the tombs continue to cause deep resentment among many Koreans, who quite reasonably don't really care a fig for historical context.

The plaque is no longer there, but the nose mound is. I took a look at it when I was in Kyoto earlier in my trip and, as per Hideyoshi's wishes, found it well-tended by the locals. Apparently, it is popular for school trips from Hiroshima, presumably because of the city's heightened awareness of the horrors of war, but most Japanese are unaware of its existence. Korean tourists still come to pay their respects, though. It was larger than I expected, a grassy hill supported by a hexagonal stone wall dwarfing the surrounding houses. There were fresh flowers at the top of some steps leading to a kind of altar and a stone monument, along with some random shrubbery. Close by was a playground; electricity cables crisscrossed above. There was a community noticeboard on one of the walls. A neighbor grew plants against another.

The Kyoto tomb is not the only resting place of Imjin War noses in Japan. In 1983 another long-rumored tomb, the Thousand Nose Mound, was unearthed in Bizen, in Okayama Prefecture, west of Osaka. Its discovery revived the subject of the noses in Korea, and in 1990 a Korean Buddhist monk, Pak Sam-jung, started a campaign to bring them back. He finally got permission from the Japanese in 1992 but excavations revealed that, sadly, there was nothing left of the noses themselves. Unperturbed, the

Koreans took some symbolic soil to a temple in southwest Korea, where it was interred amid great ceremony.

I thought I would try to find the noses' new burial place and pay my respects. I didn't have much to go on other than a reference I had found to a temple in Buan, a county on the southwest coast of South Korea. In a guidebook I find a "Naesosa Temple" a few miles south west of the town of Buan, capital of the county, in Byeonsanbando National Park. If I were looking to rebury the noses of ancestors who had died defending the honor of my country, I thought as I set the Kia's GPS, I would want to put them somewhere appropriately grand and ancient. Naesosa was built in the seventh century, and is the largest and most important Buddhist temple in the region. Also, Naesosa sounds a bit like "nose."

It takes about an hour to reach the temple, driving through a gorgeous, lush green landscape with distant rocky mountains, the vista only partly marred by the Koreans' affection for polytunnels, which transform every field into a sea of plastic corrugation. The temple complex is set in a steep cove, like the crook of an arm. It is staggeringly beautiful. A couple of gnarled old geezers are manning the ticket booth at the entrance. I ask them if this is the "nose place." They don't speak any English so I attempt a mime, but that only serves to confuse matters further. Fortunately, a family with teenage daughters arrives. The younger generation of Japanese tend to have better English than the older, and this proves to be true of the Koreans too. Mine is a singular quest, though, so I still have to write it down and add some helpful diagrams. The two young women convey my query to the men at the gate, who discuss it for a while before offering the name of another temple, a short drive away. Here, they assure me confidently, I will find the noses I seek. (At this early stage of my journey in South Korea, I still take directions offered to me by Koreans at face value.)

I head off toward the next temple, driving higher up into the forested hills along a winding mountain road lined with flowering trees, tea bushes, and densely packed pines. At the entrance to the second temple are several massive statues of warriors carved from wood with mad painted eyes as if they are absolutely furious about something—noses, perhaps? Surely, this, the Gaeamsa Temple, also built in the seventh century, must be the place. A

brief climb in fierce heat brings me to its entrance between two rows of small wooden guest huts. They seem empty, but after a few moments, a young, round-faced woman with spectacles emerges. No, she hasn't heard anything about any repatriated noses, but she kindly offers to ring the local park ranger, who might know, and hands me the phone when he answers. We struggle to make each other understood but he does furnish me with a phone number, which, I intuit, will connect me with the relevant office in Buan's city hall. When I call, no one answers. By now severely dehydrated, and running behind schedule for the Mud Festival, I give up and begin to drive out of the national park, but just as I am leaving, I pass a sign: "Ranger Station." I assume this is the workplace of the man to whom I was just speaking. My quest now hangs from the most tenuous of threads. I decide it is worth one final push.

Inside the ranger station, I find a young man in a green-and-gray nylon uniform with a patch sewn on his shoulder depicting a big brown bear. A ranger! My ranger? Yes! He admits, a little warily, that he was the man I had just been speaking to. His name is Kang Gong-hyeop. He will turn out to be a living Korean hero.

It requires some more miming and diagrams, but eventually I persuade Mr. Kang to google "Japan noses Buan." As the page loads, his eyes light up. He springs into action, picks up his phone, and excitedly rings a contact. A heated conversation ensues, and as he hangs up, Kang looks at me with a triumphant smile.

"Now I am going to tell you a story," he says. "My forefathers were made slaves by the Japanese, and they had their noses cut off and buried in Japan."

Yes, I say. I know, you see, that's why I ...

"And then a monk went there to get the noses, but the noses had..."

He pauses, trying to find the right word.

"Decayed! They had decayed so much that he just took some soil instead. I know where the soil is!"

Would I like to see the place?

Yes, I very much would.

"You can follow me," he says, gesturing toward the door.

He climbs into his small pickup truck filled with logs, and I follow him in my car out of the forest, back down the mountain, and out onto the main road to Buan. After a couple of miles, we turn down a dirt path into some fields where there stands what looks like a quite recently built wooden temple, painted in the traditional Korean decorative blue-green, red, and yellow pattern and with a roof of heavy gray ceramic tiles.

The temple was built on the site of a great battle that took place in the fields here in 1897. Unfortunately, it is closed today, but this is where the monk entombed the soil with the traces of pickled noses, says Kang. I thank him profusely. He has gone so far beyond the call of duty, leading a confused foreigner on a cockamamy quest for some long-ago disintegrated noses. We both take photos to commemorate the moment and stand around for a while wondering what to do next, before saying our awkward goodbyes.

GWANGJU

The next morning, I head back south toward Gwangju, a city of 1.5 million people perhaps best known outside Korea for the brutal crackdown on a pro-democracy uprising. This is considered by some to be the country's Tiananmen Square. It took place in May 1980 against the recently installed government of General Chun Doo-hwan. Chun's friend, President Park Chung-hee, had been assassinated the previous October by the head of the Korean equivalent of the CIA. There had been a brief period of hope for democratic reform in the country, but Chun had taken power in a military coup on the seventeenth of May, imposing martial law and ordering mass arrests of politicians and other civic leaders. The next day, more than two hundred thousand people took to the streets of Gwangju. On the twenty-first of May, the army began firing on protesters gathered in front of the city's local government offices and, for the next six days, continued to attack demonstrators, killing 165 and injuring 1,600. These are the official figures; witnesses and relatives of those still missing estimate the death toll to have been much higher. Chun claimed the pro-democracy protests were a North Korean plot. Reportedly, at one point he was preparing to send in fighter jets.

Many hundreds of protesters ended up in Seodaemun Prison in Seoul, where they were subjected to interrogation and torture. Later in my trip I

visited Seodaemun, which these days is a museum offering evocative insight into how awful it must have been to be Korean during pretty much the entirety of the twentieth century. The prison was originally built in 1908 to house Korean resistance fighters as Japan tightened its grip on the peninsula prior to full occupation. After the Japanese left, it was used by successive South Korean military regimes up until its closure in 1987. At one time it was the country's largest prison, and thousands were incarcerated there.

The cells are as they were when the prison closed, apart from some ghoulish exhibits, including a full-scale anatomical diagram depicting the torture points on the body. In the "underground torture chamber," I spent time trying to decipher a waxwork diorama of a Japanese-era interrogation scene, with one fellow suspended by the ankles and next to him a smartly dressed man wielding a kettle. "Narrow room torture" sounded especially awful—the prisoner was confined in a space so small there was not enough room to sit down or properly stand—but "airplane torture"—in which victims' arms were tied behind their backs and then used to hoist them into the air—was simply beyond imagining.

Philip, a volunteer at the museum, had experienced the airplane personally. "I was tortured like you wouldn't believe," he recalled. "I thought I was going to die." Philip (who had an English alternative name, as many Koreans do) was only seventeen when he was arrested during the Gwangju Uprising. He was imprisoned here, hundreds of miles from his family, for four months. He still has problems in the back of his neck and his shoulders as a result of the torture, he said, pointing stiffly.

The emphasis of the exhibits at the museum was very much on the Japanese era; on how the colonial rulers had turned Korea into a "state of slavery and frantically attempted to liquidate Korean culture and language," as one caption put it; and how "In spite of the Japanese forcible annexation of Korea in 1910, the Korean people were never frustrated about the annexation but actively launched independent movements. From 1910 to 1945, they strongly fought against the Japanese rulers with various methods to recover their country," and so on.

Generally, the museum evaded the issue of the Korean military's role in carrying out the dirty work of its dictators in the decades after the Japanese left. In terms of the Gwangju Uprising, the military were, one caption explains, "possessed by demons," which is why they "gave up their humanity ... turned into senseless and mindless beasts." I suppose that's one explanation for bayoneting demonstrators in coffee shops and using flamethrowers on peaceful civilian protesters, but I was curious as to how Philip felt about the fact that his own countrymen had been responsible for his imprisonment and torture. Not a problem, he told me. After democracy came to South Korea in the late 1980s, the military apologized to him for his suffering, and he held no grudge against them. He blames the Americans for Gwangju: "They could have stopped it." The United States did give tacit and sometimes concrete support to Chun and other South Korean military dictatorships. Washington stood by as the junta murdered thousands of their own citizens, not just during President Jimmy Carter's administration at the time of Gwangju, but on many occasions prior to that, and even afterward, all in the name of holding communism at bay.

One of the first things Moon Jae-in did after he was elected in 2017 was commission a government investigation into the massacre. This would be the fourth such investigation. During the first, the military experienced a strange collective amnesia. After another investigation, in 1996, Chun and his successor and ally, Roh Tae-woo, were sentenced to life and seventeen years, respectively, only for both to be pardoned by the then president, Kim Young-sam. A later 2007 investigation could find no military documents relating to the uprising whatsoever.

I had read that there was a museum about the uprising in Gwangju itself, and after a lengthy orbit of what seems to be a strangely centerless city, I finally find it in a municipal building, the May 18 Memorial Culture Center.

The center is mostly empty, but in a dark corner on the first floor of the entrance atrium there is a small, temporary-looking cluster of information stands recalling the brutality of the military at the time—at one point going as far as to describe their actions as a "genocide"—describing how soldiers ransacked houses and carried off young protesters like Philip. Nearby, I find

some people working in a separate office. This is the International Affairs Department, with a staff of twenty. A polite young woman appears from behind a bookcase. Her name is Lee Dasom, and she is the assistant coordinator. The center's activities range from organizing a winter school for young human rights defenders to running a cultural and educational department and helping with ongoing research into the events of May 1980, she says. Wasn't everything already known? I ask.

"Actually, we are not really aware who the perpetrator was who ordered the shooting of people," Lee tells me. Candidates range from the former president to various military officers. How involved were the Americans? Lee didn't think any orders came directly from Washington but it was more a question of them turning a blind eye to the brutality of the Chun regime. "We aren't sure. It's a long, tricky question. For me, American responsibility is because they allowed the troops to move to Gwangju. They knew it was happening, and they didn't stop it."

Of course the victims of the Gwangju Uprising and their families deserve to know the truth about what happened, but, equally, I couldn't help feeling that it was too easy to place the blame on a distant, long-defunct US administration. There is evidence that General John Wickham, the US military commander in South Korea at the time, approved the sending of troops to Gwangju in response to the demonstrations, and South Koreans have a love-hate relationship with the United States to this day because of what many feel was US betrayal of the democratic movement, but still, shouldn't the focus of blame be on the South Korean leadership at the time and its own military?

Yet, as we've heard, President Chun Doo-hwan, who was convicted in 1996 for his role in the massacre—not to mention found guilty of corruption charges involving tens of millions of dollars that he has never repaid—was quickly pardoned, with the blessing of a subsequent, democratically elected president, Kim Dae-jung.

At the time of writing, Chun is still alive. He is eighty-eight years old. In 2019 his lawyers attempted to use a diagnosis of Alzheimer's to avoid a court appearance in Gwangju. Chun was accused of "defaming the dead," after he had called a witness of the massacre—a priest, now dead—a liar in

an exculpatory memoir his son had published a couple of years ago. His lawyers failed to convince the judge, and Chun attended the case. It was first time he had been to the city since the massacre, and there was understandably a sizable protest.

The case is ongoing, but according to Korean media reports, Chun's Alzheimer's diagnosis does not appear to prevent him from enjoying regular games of golf.

SEOUL I

The closer I come to Seoul, the more cataclysmic the pollution grows. An hour outside the capital and I can't really see the countryside, just a rusty haze. In the queue on the highway, I edge past a beaten-up old pickup truck loaded with about twenty caged dogs, not the kind sold as pets. It feels like I am in some Ballardian anthropocene dystopia.

How do people live with this pollution? Apparently, they don't. The government quotes a figure of twelve thousand deaths per year due to airborne particulates, so presumably the real toll is much higher. According to the OECD, South Korea has the worst air quality of its member nations. Later, I heard that the air improved during the 2018 Winter Olympics because factories were ordered to close for a few weeks, which rather undermines the often heard claim made by the Korean administration that the pollution is "all the fault of the Chinese."

From what little I can see beyond the hood of the car, the South Korean capital doesn't appear to have suburbs. It goes from forested valleys and those now familiar polytunnel fields straight to dense thickets of tower blocks, which continue unbroken until I reach the River Han. It all looks like it was thrown up in a hurry sometime around 1983, with a broken promise to "sort it out later when there was more time," shaped by the

cyclone of cash that has engulfed it for the past few decades, unhindered by regulations, planning, or taste.

Half the population of South Korea lives within the metropolitan region, and it would appear every single one of them drinks coffee at least once a day. As real estate agents are to London and pharmacies are to Paris, so are coffee shops to Seoul. They are everywhere; 18,316 of them to be precise, with two to three hundred opening every month. The average South Korean over the age of twenty drinks 413 cups of coffee a year. The country spends a bewildering \$5.68 billion a year on the stuff, and consumption is still increasing. At one point I count three coffee shops next to one another. This city makes Seattle look like Harrogate.

I dump the car at my hotel in Itaewon, a rather sleazy expat district full of tacky bars and sticky sidewalks, and head out to explore. I take the subway to the Gangnam neighborhood. Koreans actually talk on trains, sometimes to one another, but mostly into their phones, loudly and constantly. In Japan, no one ever does this.

The South Koreans are the biggest users of smartphones in the world. We are all struggling with our screen addictions, but these people put the “vice” in device. Based on what I saw, I would estimate that at any given time, around 80 percent of Koreans are glued to their phones. I lost count of the people I saw holding their phones horizontally in front of their faces, headphones plugged in, watching films as they walked or blocked escalators, elbows splayed. In my entire time in the city over three separate visits, I saw not a single person reading an actual physical newspaper or book. Not one. Elon Musk has a company, Neuralink, which is working on a brain-machine interface, a physical connection between the human mind and technology. Forget it, Elon—the Koreans have beaten you to it. They have mind-melded with their Samsung Galaxies.

The second shock is that people spit with abandon here. And spitting is not the only customarily private bodily function the Koreans perform in public. I hear my first uninhibited fart on my second day, at the War Memorial of Korea, the national war museum. Public flatulence is apparently no biggie in South Korea, but the first couple of times it happens within earshot, I am still startled. One time, I literally jump. Older Korean

men are always the culprits. As for younger Korean men, they seem completely preoccupied with their appearance. They have the look of people who spend far too long in front of the bathroom mirror. The large, full-length mirrors hanging close to the ticket barriers at many subway stations are utilized equally by both genders.¹ Then again, if I looked as good as they do, I would want to admire myself too. Korean men clearly spend a lot of time at the gym; they are buff and trim, although having lavished so much time on their physique and face, it seems strange that they are content to dress so uniformly in a style I came to think of as “High Street Hipster.” There is a particular dearth of imagination when it comes to their glasses, which are either thick, flat-fronted black frames like Psy’s (of “Gangnam Style” fame), or thin, round black frames with a gold bridge. It is literally a binary choice.

Other Japan-Korea differences: In Japan tattoos are frowned upon because they tend to be the preserve of the yakuza; having one will get you banned from the *onsen* (communal baths), but in Seoul they are employed to a near-Scandinavian degree by both men and women. As for the quantities of “product” they are using in their hair and on their skin, Korean men make Joan Collins look restrained. According to a 2018 BBC report, they use more cosmetics per capita than any other men anywhere in the world, a fifth of the world’s supply. In Japan, the subway stations and the walkways connecting them are filled with cake, candy, and ice cream stands; in Seoul, they have replaced the confections with makeup and beauty products. South Korea’s largest health and beauty chain is Olive Young. Its flagship store, here in Gangnam, Seoul’s glitziest district, offers fifteen thousand products. I take one look at the placenta masks, double-eyelid tape, and snail-extract repair creams, and retreat, bewildered.

At one point on the subway, a group of university students enters my car. Of the three boys in the group, two of them are sporting full-face makeup: foundation, mascara, eye-liner, pale lipstick. They have done it extremely well, and look great, but the point is, this is an everyday thing for them. They aren’t on their way to a party or a club, but a classroom.

Cosmetics ads are everywhere, from vast roadside billboards, erected apparently without restriction, to the smaller ads that plaster every available

space on subway trains and, again, address themselves as much to males as to females. Though city hall has promised to phase out plastic surgery ads on the subway, the message has not yet reached Gangnam Station, which has wall-to-wall posters promising that you too can become a blemish-free, symmetrically-faced replicant. The ads always feature the same type of shiny-skinned, anodyne-androgynous young people promoting various unguents and beautifiers. The focus is on skin-whitening and tightening, the aim apparently to turn one's face into Chopin's death mask. No target audience is too young.

Around 1.2 million plastic surgery procedures are carried out in South Korea every year, the highest number per capita in the world. One report I read claimed that half of Korean women in their twenties have had surgery, and a third of all women in Seoul. One of the most popular procedures is double-eyelid surgery, a component of the so-called "Gangnam look," which, again based on empirical observation, involves having an almond-shaped face with a pointy chin, a synchronized swimmer's nose, and a forehead like a billiard table.

Why has physical appearance been raised to such a pitch of fetishized neurosis in South Korea? Why the desperate need to conform to such a narrow bandwidth of physical conventions? Is this somehow a symptom of Korea's terrible century of occupation, war, and military dictatorship— a giddy, liberated release? Or is it a symptom of the constant threat of annihilation looming in the North (*Be the best you, while you still can!*)? In one newspaper report on the industry, I read a quote by a Gangnam plastic surgeon: "Koreans react strongly to power, privilege, and status because of a certain survival mentality." Perhaps beauty is a power play. Up until a few years ago, job applicants in South Korea were required to attach a photograph of themselves to their CV; it is not hard to imagine how this might put pressure on the young to look a certain way. Maybe the Koreans value personal beauty because their urban environment is so dispiriting? They can do little about where they live, but they can at least control how they look. Whatever the explanation, I am certain that if there was such a thing as a psycho-anthropologist, they would have a field day diagnosing

the South Koreans. There was only one way I could get to the bottom of all this. I would have to go and have some plastic surgery done on myself.²

I ring my wife to tell her I am about to go and get “some surgery done.” She doesn’t ask what specifically I am having done, which, on reflection, is probably not a good sign.

Some years ago, two small red bumps appeared on the side of my nose. I had them checked by my doctor, who shrugged in the same way she does when presented with all my other age-related ailments. They were harmless, she said. She may actually have tutted. But here I was in the global capital of cosmetic surgery. What better opportunity would I have to fight back against the aging process, resist the march of time, laugh in the face of ... well, I guess, my own face?

I take the subway to Apgujeong, close to Gangnam and home of the largest concentration of surgeries in the city—the capital of the capital of cosmetic surgery, if you like. Again, the train car is full of ads for surgeons, who are without exception really quite ugly middle-aged men, posing alongside blemish-free models like something from the Tyrell Corporation catalog. There are ads for breast surgery, jaw-sculpting, and “nose control measures.” One entices with “Surgical facial rejuvenation for the North East Asians”; another promotes “Round faced lifts.” Another claims to be able to cure bowleggedness. At Apgujeong station, a billboard quotes Audrey Hepburn: “Happy girls are the prettiest.” I’m not sure she meant it the same way they do.

Outside the station, I survey my options. I can see a good half dozen plastic surgeons; some buildings house four floors of clinics, including one called “The Second Coming.” Nearby is a kind of cosmetic surgery tourist visitor center offering brochures for many of the practices and with open consultations rooms. Here I read one clinic’s brochure, which boasts that it was responsible for the world record amount of fat extracted from one person via liposuction: 21,500 cubic centimeters. “Turn the 102kg body into S Line,” it offers. According to the OECD’s 2015 obesity figures, the Koreans have the second-lowest rates of adult obesity (around 5 percent) in the developed world, beaten only by the Japanese. Where are they finding all this fat to suck up?

A little way down the street, I come to another clinic. It meets my main criteria for plastic surgery (it does not have a biblical reference in its name), so I enter and explain to the Stepford receptionists what I am hoping to get done. They call the surgeon, a short, round man in his late fifties. I notice immediately that he has a slightly skewed left eye: not your full Marty Feldman, but enough so I don't know which one to look at when talking to him. I make my excuses and try another surgeon a little farther down the street. This one's eyes are both facing in the right direction. I agree to the operation.

I am shown to a basement waiting area next to a door marked "Laser Room." A pretty young man dabs some anesthetic cream on my nose and instructs me to wait twenty minutes for it to take effect. I note that the clinic sells a range of bridal wear as well as a range of cosmetic products, among them "Skinbolic," with its patented "skin injecting" technology.

Finally, the time has come for my operation. In the laser room, I recline on a dentist's chair. The pretty young man holds the end of a vacuum cleaner tube to the side of my face. Odd. The surgeon arrives, trailing an air of brisk efficiency and, I only now notice, quite trembly hands. He double-checks what exactly it is I want removed.

"Is it this?" he asks, pointing to a completely different part of my face with which, up until now, I have been reasonably happy. "No, here, these things on my nose," I say, gesturing to them.

Unperturbed, the surgeon goes to work on my red nose-lumps with his laser pen. It only takes a few seconds, less than half a minute, but the pain is excruciating and, despite the vacuum cleaner going full blast, the room is filled with the smell of burning flesh, as if someone is spit-roasting a pig.

At the end of it all, I am shown a mirror and see that, in place of the red lumps, I now have two red sores. I am assured by the surgeon that they will heal in a week or so. As long as I purchase some Skinbolic, and apply it twice daily.

SEOUL II

It is another baking-hot day, which is good because it means that the Namsangol Hanok Village, a traditional Korean village in central Seoul, is mostly empty. Good because my tae kwon do lesson is to be a public affair, taking place in an open-sided rectangular pavilion, its roof painted minty green, orange, and mauve.

I sign a release form and am given some white pajamas to change into, removing my shoes and socks. Up in the pavilion I meet my instructor, Mr. Kang, who is a good six feet three inches tall, handsome, and a black belt. We are joined by the only other person mad enough to sign up for a public tae kwon do lesson in 100 degree heat, a small Japanese woman called Sue, from Nagoya.

The pavilion overlooks an ornamental pond. Mr. Kang explains that the pond acts as an ancient air conditioner, cooling hot air as it moves across the surface, but I am not feeling it. As he speaks, he eyes me up and down and suggests we begin with some basic stretching exercises. Within just a few moments, I am sweating profusely and have pulled two muscles I did not know I had. Tae kwon do is South Korea's national sport, Mr. Kang says. He is doing a talky bit to give me time to recover. This martial art is over 2,300 years old. Its name means "the way of the foot and the fist."

Back to the action: He shows us how to block an opponent's blows by lifting our forearms up above our heads, then down below our waists. We practice this. It feels a bit like a Village People routine. Mr. Kang now demonstrates a more complex punching-while-stamping-forward-then-kicking sequence, which ends with an aggressive exhalation: "Huh!" Our index and middle fingers are connected through a line to our forearms, he explains, but we must keep our little fingers tucked in. Apparently the pinkie is crucial in supporting the power of the punch.

Another pause. Mr. Kang looks concerned as I bend over to catch my breath. He invites us to consider the Korean flag, with its central yin-yang symbol. See how it resembles the way the little finger supports a punch? And look how the four groups of three lines in each corner of the flag are like the four blocking points we've just practiced. The other key to a tae kwon do punch is to twist your fist at the moment of impact. Sue performs this annoyingly well, but later admits to having studied tae kwon do for three years in Japan, which is downright devious. When it is my turn I feel as though I beat her in terms of sheer commitment.

Next, Kang picks up some P-shaped padded bats that we must attempt to hit in a special sequence, a kind of Whac-A-Mole affair. I am quite good at this too, and am actually beginning to enjoy tae kwon do, but then I catch sight of a group of teenagers sitting in the corner of the hall watching us, and imagine how this looks from their vantage point. It is too late for a midlife crisis of confidence though, as we have arrived at the grand finale: breaking a piece of wood in half with a single punch.

"If you hit it in the middle, you only need a force of about five to ten kilos," says Kang. "But if you hit the edge, it is about a ton." On my first attempt, I miss the board completely and hit his forearm, the blow glancing off as if I am striking an overinflated bouncy castle. I don't think he even notices. At the second attempt, my aim is still a bit askew, but I break the board. I pick up the pieces proudly. Looking more closely, I think they might be balsa wood.

The session ends with a short lecture from Mr. Kang about tae kwon do and its role in recent Korean history. After the devastation of the civil war, South Korea was helped in its recovery by sixteen different nations, and

sixteen tae kwon do masters were sent to each of them by way of thanks. So, long before K-pop, Korean movies, and Korean TV dramas were being devoured by a grateful international public, tae kwon do was the country's first postwar attempt at cultural branding, at defining who the Koreans were in foreign eyes. It occurs to me that tae kwon do is in this sense the forefather of *hallyu*—the name given to the international success, the “Korean wave,” of popular culture that began in the 1990s, the watershed year being 2002 when the country cohosted the FIFA World Cup with Japan, the K-pop singer BoA had a number one hit in Japan, and the TV series *Winter Sonata* debuted.

These days, South Korea's image abroad is almost entirely founded on these popular entertainments. Some feel this is a shame because the country has so much more traditional culture and art to offer, going back centuries, but most Koreans I speak to are proud and grateful that their country has any kind of international cultural profile at all, that it's not just known for missile tests and demilitarized zones. And *hallyu* has worked particularly well in the country's close neighbors, China and Japan. In a 2018 poll of Japanese people, an “interest in South Korean drama, music, or culture” was cited by just over half the respondents as their number one reason for “having a good impression” of South Koreans.

Jonathan Kim is more qualified than most to talk about *hallyu*. He is one of the most successful South Korean film producers of the past two decades, responsible for five of the country's top fifty highest-grossing films. I meet the dapper fifty-seven-year-old later that morning, after my tae kwon do efforts, in his offices above (where else?) a coffee shop in Itaewon.

“I get that question all the time from people everywhere. Why not a Japan wave or a China wave, why Korea?” Kim says as we begin to talk. He is sitting behind a big movie mogul's desk and, I am pleased to see, is wearing one of those multipocketed safari waistcoats just like film people are supposed to. I sit in a director's chair. “Finally, it dawned on me. I looked at the history of our country, which was once three countries or kingdoms. For thousands of years, it had this stability. Not like China—you know, every forty-five years, everything changes. When you are stable like

Korea, basically you have nothing problematic, so what do you do? You party!”

It’s an interesting theory; after all, Japan’s own period of stability, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, resulted in its own great cultural flowering, but then again, didn’t *hallyu* follow straight after Korea’s century of oppression, war, and destitution? Kim has an answer: The suffering helped make Korean art universal. That, and the invention of the VHS.

“In the 1980s, we were making all the VHS machines, but we didn’t have much domestic content,” he says. Porn was—and remains—illegal in South Korea, so that avenue was unavailable for the new VHS industry. Fortunately, a new generation of directors and producers emerged to meet the demands of the new format, and the chaebol—the Korean conglomerates who were manufacturing the VHS recorders—had the money to back them. Another boost to the industry came in 1997, when South Korea finally got rid of censorship.

One of the first movies to take advantage of this was a North-South Korean romantic comedy called *Shiri*, starring Kim Yun-Jin, who later appeared in the US TV series *Lost*. *Shiri* was partly funded by Samsung. At the time the average budget for a South Korean movie was less than a million dollars. *Shiri* cost over seven million but it went on to beat *Titanic*’s record for South Korean box office receipts.

“*Shiri* is the name of a Korean fish, so we say that was the fish which sank the *Titanic*,” chuckles Kim. He has enjoyed his own *hallyu* successes. In 2003 his company produced *Silmido*, an action movie about death-row prisoners trained for a mission to assassinate the North Korean leader. It was the first film to break the ten-million-ticket-sales barrier in South Korea, partly because its release coincided with the opening of the country’s first multiplexes. *Shiri*’s success in Japan and Hong Kong alerted the South Korean government to a potential export stream, and it made tens of million of dollars available as seed money for Korean films. The government continues to fund roughly 40 percent of the domestic film industry. There is, though, still some debate about what role the South Korean government played in the global success of *hallyu*.

In her 2014 book, *The Birth of Korean Cool*, Eunyoung Hong attributes much of the success to the direct involvement of the South Korean culture ministry, but British expat journalist Andrew Salmon disagrees: “[Hong] went with the whole top-down thing, which, to be fair, is how everything else is in Korea—the economic revolution, the high-tech revolution in the early 1990s—but the only thing we’ve really had from the bottom up is *hallyu*,” he told me. Michael Breen, another British journalist who witnessed the phenomenon, believes the success happened *in spite* of the Korean government’s meddling. In his book *The New Koreans*, Breen writes that its attempts to jump on the *hallyu* bandwagon “have all the style of your dad leaping up and doing his Mick Jagger moves at a teenager party.”

Whether the government was behind their success or not, Korean films took the world by storm. Probably the best-known Korean director to emerge from the first wave was Park Chan-wook. His first overseas hit, the utterly bonkers revenge movie *Oldboy*, was released in 2003. It is not for the squeamish, or octopus lovers. One of the strengths of contemporary Korean movie-making lies in the fact that directors like Park often write their own scripts and enjoy greater levels of autonomy than their peers in Hollywood. The result is highly idiosyncratic films with a raw, some might argue specifically Korean, emotionalism, plus lots of inventively graphic violence.

Another explanation for the success of Korean films, in China in particular, is that they combine widely recognizable, traditional aspects of Asian society with cool modern lifestyles. “They see on the television or movie screen a modernized society filled with capitalistic commodities like modern buildings, cars, restaurants, and fancy clothes. At the same time, however, they observe behavioral patterns that accord with Confucian traditions, including emphasis on the family, male-dominance, patriarchy, strong hierarchy, spirit of self-sacrifice among males, and female obedience,” writes anthropologist Jang Soo-hyun of Kwangwoon University.

Korean television series have been just as popular as the movies. As with the film industry, the rise of Korean TV dramas also relied on new

technology in need of content—in this case, the arrival of cable TV in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Korean dramas were cheaper than their rivals from Japan. “The people kind of look the same.” Kim laughs. “So all you have to do is dub, and they don’t know the difference.”

South Korean TV enjoyed several massive international hits, such as *Dae Jang Geum* (“Jewel in the Palace”), a fifteenth-century royal epic, which sold to ninety countries. The Chinese loved it, including reportedly the then Chinese premier, Hu Jintao. The Japanese preferred *Winter Sonata*, a love saga, which first aired in Japan in 2003. Its male lead, Bae Yong-joon, inspired hordes of female Japanese fans to visit the Korean locations where the series had been filmed. Both dramas were also successful in the Philippines, Vietnam, and farther afield in places like Iran and South America.

I hesitate at this point to turn the conversation to K-pop because I find its appeal elusive. It’s not that I have especially refined musical tastes—I don’t—but synthetic Auto-Tuned pop, emoted by winsome teenagers with all the vocal nuance of a faulty car alarm is probably not intended to appeal to middle-aged men. I don’t even really understand what K-pop is. For example, this is a quote from a *New Yorker* article I read about one current K-pop band: “They dabbled in the golden era sounds of G-funk, boom-bap, and turntablism, alongside the residual nu-metal and overloaded trap bangers then commonplace among Korean boy bands. Few made it out of those years without a dubstep breakdown.”

Jonathan Kim tells me K-pop is where the term *hallyu* originates. “We had a singing group called H.O.T., and they became very, very big in China. When they performed in China, we would see people waving Korean flags in the audience—that was where the ‘Korean wave’ thing came from—a Chinese DJ called it that.” In 2000 H.O.T. was the first Korean band to perform in Beijing. In 2006 BoA (the queen of Korean pop, real name Kwon Bo-ah), became the first Korean act to reach number one on the Japanese charts. Actor-singer Rain followed in 2007, and from 2009 to 2014, Korean music exports grew by almost 60 percent a year.

Then came the fat man with the horse-riding dance, and the Western mainstream media went all-in too. Despite being entirely unintelligible to a

Western audience, once seen, the video for “Gangnam Style” could never be forgotten. The South Koreans actually found Psy’s 2012 success as a *hallyu* act odd, as he is a portly fellow and K-pop acts are almost as a rule preternaturally slim and trim, and the two comedians who appeared with him in the video were much more famous in South Korea than he was.

In the last couple of years, *hallyu* has begun to decline in China. Concerned about the potential power of cultural imports, the Chinese authorities have made concerted efforts to generate their own domestic TV dramas and films, and Chinese pop has undergone something of a boom too. The THAAD missile defense system business further damaged South Korea’s cultural exports to China.

“We were completely banned [in China]. Cinema, TV, music, everything. We can’t even use our own name as a company, so I had to create a Hong Kong company,” says Kim. “It was like the [Chinese] animosity moved from the Japanese to the Koreans. I have had six contracts ‘delayed,’ but really they have been canceled.”

I asked Cheong Young-rok, an economist whom I met at Seoul National University and who has focused on relations with China for many years, how these kinds of sanctions worked.

“It is very ambiguous. There is no strict clear policy, no sanctions, it is indirect patriotism. About eighty-eight million Chinese are members of the Communist Party, which is huge and, you know, SMS is very prevalent in China.” In other words, the message goes out almost subliminally: “We are not happy that Korea is allowing this,” and suddenly the Chinese stop going on holiday to Korea and go to Thailand or Indonesia instead. Within a year, tourism from China to Korea declined from five million to two million; K-pop stars found their visa applications to China refused; thousands of Hyundais and Kias were left standing in the ports. Something similar had happened a few years earlier in Japan—the Japanese market had turned against *hallyu* when South Korea and Japan had clashed over the Dokdo Islands/Takeshima. Cultural exports are, it seems, the first thing to suffer when relations deteriorate between the East Asian siblings.

Jonathan Kim is now turning his attention elsewhere in Asia instead: “When I look at Southeast Asia, it reminds me of South Korea in the early

nineties. They don't make enough movies themselves, and major American companies are dominating." It is an opportunity Chinese films could never take advantage of, he says; their cultural output is just too Chinese, too specific. "The jokes they use, the references—other countries, even Chinese-speaking countries, don't understand them. The mentality and trends in China are very different right now, and because of the censorship, it's not edgy enough for audiences here. Chinese movies are too predictable."

According to Kim, a typical Chinese box office hit resembles a 1990s Korean rom-com. "It is always the son of a rich man, filthy rich, who is the main star. Everything has to be flamboyant, with big houses." He once pitched a movie to the Chinese about a working-class boy who falls in love with a girl who has terminal cancer. "She says, 'Don't worry, we will meet in heaven,' but in China, heaven has too [many] religious connotations. You can't have ghosts either. No ghosts. And no cops. That's how bad it is." He leans back in his chair and throws his arms up in exasperation. In the end, he had to change the protagonist into a rich man. "Chinese people want to see rich people on the screen instead of themselves. The final word is always, 'This is China. This is different.'"

Happily, the rest of the world has yet to reach the *hallyu* saturation point. In June 2018 the Korean boy band BTS became the first K-pop group to top the *Billboard* 200, America's album chart, and with a song in Korean to boot. Some say this was a direct result of the Chinese sanctions; the Koreans had instead focused their efforts on the American market. Whether true or not, the Koreans are definitely back, and the next waves of *hallyu* are already gaining momentum: the South Korean e-sports industry is huge, having doubled since 2009 to the point where it accounts for almost 15 percent of the global market. Playing computer games for money is Korea's new unofficial national sport. Many predict that next will be the Korean cosmetics and plastic surgery industry, or "K-beauty." Korean skincare and makeup trends are increasingly popular throughout Asia.

Sometimes these *hallyu* categories cross-over, as happened in 2017 when the K-pop band SixBomb released "Getting Pretty," a song extolling the virtues of plastic surgery. They didn't stop there: each of the four female

group members underwent various procedures—breast implants, cheekbones shaved, nose jobs, etc—and in the video they danced with their bandages on in the operating room as they sang, “Everyone follows me, they know I’m pretty.”

In other words, reports of the demise of *hallyu* and its soft power have been greatly exaggerated.

DAECHEON BEACH, BORYEONG

I meet the Mormons at the Mud Festival bus stop. The two young men are being loudly harassed by a group of other young Americans, drunk spring break types in gaudy nylon wife-beaters, baseball caps, and cargo shorts who are inviting the Mormons to join them for a drink.

I don't interfere because I am a coward, but wait until the drunks have moved on like a whoop of gorillas in the direction of a nearby bar, and sidle up to the two young evangelists, with their buzz cuts, narrow ties, and short-sleeved shirts. What on earth are they doing here?

"I'm based here for two years," the taller of the two says cheerfully. He introduces himself as Elder Dustin. He looks like a young, goofy Robert Redford. "We're learning the language, being missionaries," says Elder Burt, the darker-haired of the two. The Koreans here in Daecheon, on the west coast of Korea, two hours south of Seoul, have been very receptive to their message, apparently.

The first Christian to come to Korea accompanied the Japanese invaders during the Imjin War in the late sixteenth century. Today, almost a third of South Koreans are Christians, compared to about 1 percent of Japanese, and perhaps 2 or 3 percent of Chinese. The majority of Korean Christians are Protestants; conversion boomed after the Americans arrived in 1945.

Today, Seoul boasts the largest Christian congregation in the world, the Full Gospel Church, as well as a few wilder “spin-offs,” most famously the Unification Church, or the Moonies, founded in 1954 by the late Sun Myung Moon, noted tax felon/messiah. Christianity in all its forms is big business here. I was surprised to see an ATM built into the wall of one church I passed in central Seoul, but by all accounts Korean churches are intensely relaxed about money—members typically donate around 10 percent of their income and many churches are extremely wealthy as a consequence. Korea expert Daniel Tudor writes: “Protestantism is seen as the pro-capitalist religion ... 42 percent of CEOs of large Korean firms are Protestant. Large Protestant churches are criticized by some as places where business networking and deal-making take place.”

Back at the bus stop, I wonder aloud why the Mormons always travel in twos. “We help each other avoid temptation,” says Burt. There is certainly plenty of that here at Daecheon Beach in Boryeong on the Yellow Sea coast. This is the home of the annual Mud Festival, which looks, from what I’ve seen of it, to be an excuse for scantily clad hedonistic excess (should you need an excuse). Each summer this seaside resort town, with its long, wide sandy beach fronted by an ugly rash of 1990s-built hotels and restaurants, draws around four hundred thousand people, who wallow and play in what is essentially a gigantic mud bath.

The Mud Festival has been going on for twenty years, and Daecheon has embraced its theme. Hotels have names like Mudbeach Hotel and Hotel Mudrin (which I *think* is a play on “Mandarin Oriental”); there are mud-themed statues and monuments along the seafront, and a Mud Museum (a glorified cosmetics boutique). The main action of the festival takes place in a giant mud-filled pen featuring all manner of obstacle-course amusements. People can fire water cannons at one another, wrestle, slide, whatever. There is a separate children’s zone, but the main mud zone closes at around six p.m., before people get too drunk anyway. Around the mud pit are various other mud-related activities—such as body-painting ... actually, that’s about it. Just the body painting. The rest of the stalls mostly focus on selling pissy Korean beer.

I had assumed the mud was a naturally occurring phenomenon, as the coast here boasts one of the world's largest tidelands, but the truth is slightly more prosaic, as I discover when I get chatting to one of the festival organizers, Chang Woo-hoi.

"Oh no," admits Chang cheerfully. "We ship the mud in from a cosmetics factory, two hundred fifty kilotons in powder form, and then we add water. The powder is the base for all their cosmetics." So basically, all the people in front of us are wallowing in a very expensive beauty product? "Exactly!" Total revenue from the festival last year was 70 billion Korean won (\$57 million). Daecheon lives off this messy festivity for the entire year.

Chang, a biology graduate, is a volunteer. He speaks with a distinctive Estuary English accent, which he says he picked up from playing computer games. He tells me that one positive by-product of the fact that people walk around for most of the day slathered head-to-toe in gray mud, as if they've just been rescued from quicksand, is that it neutralizes their ethnicity. "When you are covered in mud, people don't care about your skin color, what you do, where you are from, that is no problem," says Chang, who was born here in Daecheon. "Everyone just wants to enjoy themselves, or do something fun. It makes everyone the same—that's the spirit of the Mud Festival."

I ask if many Japanese people come to the Mud Festival. "Actually, the Japanese mind is a little different. They don't like to be covered with the mud, so we get very few Japanese." The event is much more popular with Americans and Europeans, especially students. "So many English," he adds, a little too wearily. I ask about safety issues. Thousands of drunk teenagers and a big slippery surface looks like a recipe for very busy emergency rooms. "Of course, there are so many accidents, especially with American military. I have been threatened by a drunk American soldier once. He wanted a fight."

There are currently 28,500 US military personnel in South Korea, many of them living in the Yongsan base right in the center of Seoul. (When Camp Humphreys, forty miles south of the capital, is completed in 2020, it will be the largest overseas US military base in the world.) The Mud

Festival attracts so many soldiers—and with them, so many fights—that the army sends along military police to patrol the event. I try to imagine other sovereign nations tolerating that kind of thing, but for now, my thoughts are on the Japanese and their reluctance to get muddy. I share their reticence, but very much contrary to all my natural instincts, I am now going to change into some different clothes—a K-pop band T-shirt I picked up from a nearby store and some garish shorts—which I am prepared to say goodbye to at the end of the day. I store my other things in a locker and venture forth into the mud zone.

Well, I have to tell you, my natural instincts don't know what they are talking about. Jousting on muddy inflatable mattresses turns out to be completely brilliant, and a task at which I excel, at least right up until a very large Korean woman takes her turn and sends me skittling off into the muddy pool with one (lucky) thrust.

After spending some time afterward flushing rapidly drying, grainy mud from my crevices, I retreat to the beach, where a massive stage and lighting rig has been erected. A heavily tattooed young Korean man with dreadlocks has just finished doing whatever it is he does onstage, and the audience of body-builders and gangs of girls is buzzing. Later, Psy, of “Gangnam Style” fame, will perform, although I will be long gone by then.

As for the magic mud, that lingers with me for some days afterward, but no matter: the Mud Museum, which I visit the next morning, claims it can “restrain stress” and “promote breathing of skin cells.” Not only that, it can also make people fall in love with you, and if you rub it on your forehead, you will pass your exams. Word of its magic properties has spread too: Daecheon has begun exporting the mud to the New Zealand town of Rotorua, which is planning to hold its own Mud Festival.

It seems sensible for the mud zone to close early, because by six o'clock, people are beginning to seem a little the worse for wear. I retire to one of the open-air restaurants where people sit around grills built into the tables, cooking fantastic shellfish—scallops, mussels, clams.

In *The New Koreans*, Michael Breen describes the typical Korean holiday as sunbathing on a crowded beach and then “dinner at one of a line of identical restaurants that sell only seafood and don't have a view of the

sea, lots of drink and noise, a lurch to the beach to set off fireworks, the karaoke, more noise, and then the motel.” He could have been describing Daechon, but Breen explains that until recently, there was no indigenous tourism in South Korea. People worked too hard to take time off, and there were few spare resources to preserve historic towns or prettify existing ones: “You’d be hard-pressed to find a nice-looking town.”

It reminds me that judging South Korea on the same terms as you might judge other developed nations doesn’t really work. In 1945, when the peninsula was partitioned by the United States and the Soviet Union, the South was even poorer than the North; it was one of the poorest countries in the world, in fact, with virtually no natural resources, not even enough agricultural output to feed itself. The return of the Koreans who had been working in Japan put further pressure on the country’s resources, and then came the civil war, in which more than three million were killed or starved to death. Hardly a town was unaffected by bombing, barely a tree was left standing, to the extent that General MacArthur predicted it would take at least a century to rebuild the country.

The following decades are referred to as “the Miracle on the Han”—after the river that flows through the center of Seoul—but the miracle took a while to kick off. After the war, around a third of the population of South Korea was homeless, and for the first few years the country subsisted on US handouts. Land reform, which redistributed farmland to tenants, and massive improvements in education began to pave the way for the recovery, but still, in 1961 the country’s GDP was still ranked 101st in the world, on par with Haiti. Throughout the fifties and sixties South Koreans grew accustomed to the *borit-gogae* (barley hump), the spring famine that preceded the barley harvest during which people would be forced to forage for roots, wild herbs, even tree bark. Under Park Chung-hee’s leadership, which began in 1963, the famines disappeared with a new strain of Unification Rice created by Seoul National University, among other agricultural advances. Nevertheless, unemployment in South Korea grew so dire in the mid-sixties that nearly eight thousand Korean men emigrated to West Germany to work in the coal mines and over ten thousand Korean women went there to work as nurses. In 1963 there were 46,000 Korean

applications for five hundred jobs in German mines, which paid seven times what a government worker might earn in Korea. There are still large Korean communities in parts of Germany because of this exodus.

The miraculous economic growth that eventually materialized—averaging almost 9 percent during most of the late 1960s—was largely due to the special form of state-controlled, planned private enterprise that Park introduced and closely guided. The Vietnam War boosted the South Korean economy immensely too, as did slowly thawing relations with Japan in the late 1960s, which brought cash investments. Japan also provided an economic role model, which, as one Korean commentator said, led his countrymen to “do what the Japanese have done, but cheaper and faster,” predominantly in steel, shipbuilding, electronics, and cars. Today, the South Korean economy is the twelfth largest in absolute terms in the world, and the seventh-largest exporter.

In 1953 it would have been unthinkable that South Korea would one day be in a position to export TV programs and pop songs to a grateful world; that the people of Seoul would be so awash with cash that they would spend money injecting their foreheads with monkey gland extract, or going on holiday to Japan, of all places; or that the country would host the Olympics and a FIFA World Cup. And play in the semifinals.

When I find myself recoiling at the lack of aesthetic appeal of Korea’s urban landscapes, I try to remember this. To reach the point where they can let rip in a giant mud bath without feeling guilty about it, the South Koreans had to suffer under an oppressive, murderous regime; work like blinkered drones in the worst conditions for the lowest of wages and longest of hours; and basically just suck it up, for forty long years.

SEOUL III

I arrive back in Seoul on the evening before the general election and take a walk through Myeongdong, one of Seoul's main shopping and nightlife districts. One of the presidential candidates, a small, round man with hair like a Playmobil figure, is holding a rally. Clearly not a front-runner, he has wisely chosen to set up his stage in a narrow shopping street where there isn't much space for supporters, thus averting the risk of Trump Inauguration Syndrome. His followers wave Korean flags and chant slogans. Many are waving American flags too, suggesting this is one of the more conservative candidates. The shoppers go about their business without giving him a second glance.

A little later, outside city hall, I come across a small but persistent band of pro-Park Geun-hye protestors who have pitched their camp here and are trying to convince passersby that the ex-president's recent impeachment is a sham. "It is a subversive conspiracy promoted by the press, the prosecution, and the national assembly. Dear fellow citizens, let's fight tooth and nail!" reads one of their banners, with a picture of Park Geun-hye wearing a lovely canary-yellow *hanbok*, the Korean traditional dress with its distinctive, high-waisted A-line. The protestors are huddled nearby in a plastic gazebo drinking coffee. They are all quite elderly and initially try to brush off my questions by claiming that they cannot speak English. I start to

walk away, but one of their number, a gentleman in a gardening hat and fishing vest, gestures grudgingly, as if he might be able to help.

I ask who is behind the ousting of Park. “North Korea,” the man says. “They want Park to go. She has been strong against them.” There are pro-Trump banners nearby and one poster of the then secretary of state. Someone has labeled the poster “Sir Rex Tillerson.” As he enjoys his forced retirement, I hope Rex will take comfort from the knighthood.

There is a core of voters, generally of the older generation, who are prepared to ignore or deny the deeds of the dictator’s daughter and her brazen cronies in the name of maintaining a strong line against North Korea and appeasing the Americans. Can they pull off a surprise victory tomorrow night? (Obviously, we all know they couldn’t: Moon won in a landslide, but allow me a little suspense.)

The next evening is election night. I spend most of it among the surprisingly sparse crowds on Sejongno, the broad avenue through the center of the city where the mass protests had formed earlier and from which the major TV stations are now broadcasting live. Searchlights streak the sky, cameras mounted on booms swoop overhead, and news anchors pace the shiny floors. Beside the stages, massive Samsung screens show live broadcasts of what the assembled crowds are already seeing in real life just in front of them. But the mood is strangely subdued. At one point there is an attempt to get a Moon Jae-in chant going, but the response is lackluster. There is a much bigger cheer when a goofy kid from the crowd is pulled up on the stage to give his view on proceedings.

I get chatting with a young couple standing just in front of me, but make the mistake of asking who they voted for. The young woman puts her finger to her lips and says, “Secret.” It is all quite a contrast to the crowds that had formed right here just a few months earlier and ended up toppling what was, for all its obvious faults, still a democratically elected government.

Those demonstrations had begun in late 2016 with candlelit rallies peopled by an unusually broad range of society, including mothers pushing strollers, and had continued every Saturday for several weeks, growing in size and organizational efficiency, acquiring stages, portable lavatories, cleanup teams, musical performances, fireworks, and street food. The

organizers were a coalition of 1,500 civic organizations under a banner group whose name roughly translates as the Emergency Action for Park's Resignation. By November 26, the gatherings calling for her impeachment were drawing millions.

"I was there at the beginning," student journalist Stephanie Sehoi Park told me. "It all started on social media, that there was going to be this big happening. Maybe fewer than a hundred people turned up, but eventually we ended up with a third of the population of the country." Stephanie is in her mid-twenties, studying political science at Yeonsung University and working as an intern at an online newspaper. We met by Gangnam Station a couple of days before the election and adjourned to a nearby coffee shop, an airy, spacious place with floor-to-ceiling windows and complicated muffins.

Stephanie explained that the original protests had coalesced around half a dozen different issues. People were unhappy with President Park, very unhappy at the chaebol and corruption, and extremely unhappy about the April 2014 *Sewol* ferry tragedy, in which nearly 304 people, mostly high school students, perished and for which Park was partly blamed. But then one particular issue, out of left field, began to gather momentum.

An applicant for the highly prestigious Ewha Womans University in eastern Seoul, a young woman called Chung Yoo-ra, had been accepted into the school, despite not having the requisite exam results. Clearly, someone had pulled some strings. The other students—most of whom had worked excessively hard and made painful sacrifices to achieve their grades—organized a protest. This was picked up by a journalist from JTBC, a media company that, surprisingly, given what transpired, was part of a pro-Park newspaper group. The journalist realized that the underqualified student was the daughter of Choi Soon-sil, lifelong friend, guru, and fashion advisor to the president.

"The students didn't know the big picture. They were just focused on 'Come on! She got in without proper tests!' so they were mad about that," explained Stephanie. "Then people realized she had ties to Samsung, ties to the president."

Eventually, the rest of the media couldn't ignore the story. Dominoes began to teeter. Choi Soon-sil was discovered to have acted as a go-between

in the transfer of many billions of won (equivalent to millions of dollars), delivered in cash, from Samsung and other organizations, including the National Intelligence Service, Korea's spy organization, to Park's aides in parking lots or quiet back alleys close to the Blue House (the South Korean presidential residence), in return for the passing of legislation helpful to their family owners. The money had been funneled through various foundations and "charities," one of which was keeping Choi's daughter supplied with expensive dressage horses.

Choi was eventually tried and sentenced to twenty years in prison. Her daughter, Chung Yoo-ra, twenty-one, was arrested in Denmark at the request of the South Korean authorities, where she had reportedly been buying a dressage horse with the Samsung money. For some weeks the Danes refused to allow Chung Yoo-ra's extradition out of concern for her one-year-old child. When she finally returned to South Korea, she described events as "unfair" and denied all knowledge of the bribes. She did however admit that she "didn't even know my major" when she was admitted to the university, and had preferred to concentrate on her dressage practice. This did little to endear her further to the Korean general public; neither did her other public comments, such as, "Money is a kind of ability. If you're poor, blame your parents."

President Park Geun-hye was arrested in March 2017, but denied the accusations. The prosecutors held her in custody on the pretext of wanting to prevent her from destroying evidence, but really the people wanted Park behind bars as soon as possible. Her approval rating had plunged to 9 percent. Later, with Park in prison, the media gleefully reported that the dictator's daughter, who had lived in luxury all her life, was now doing her own washing and eating \$2 dinners at a detention center in Uiwang.

Park's aloofness had always aroused the suspicion of the gregarious, demonstrative Koreans, who seemed to consider her a bit of a queer fish. She was nicknamed the Notebook Princess because of her inability to make speeches off the cuff, and she didn't hold a press conference for the first ten months of her presidency. She was a loner in a nation that much prefers to be among others.

“I would describe Mrs. Park as a rare species of South Korean. I would almost call her autistic, very self-enclosed,” Tei Tai-kin, the Zainichi academic I had met in Tokyo, told me. “Generally, South Korean people like to be with lots of people and have friends around them, but she seems to have had no friends. And that kind of isolated mind-set is peculiar.”

Stephanie Sehoi Park said something similar, that President Park was an oddball, doomed somehow: “Even before she was elected, everyone knew there was something shady about her because she wasn’t a political figure other than the fact that she was the daughter of the dictator Park Chung-hee.” In some sense, she seems to have been elected in spite of her personality and skills, largely because she commanded the loyalty and machinery of her party.

The impeachment of Park didn’t seem to follow any kind of normal legal procedure. It was almost as if she went from the Blue House to a prison cell by sheer force of public will. “It is true, her defenders have said that this is not a legal judgment, more of a political judgment,” said Stephanie Sehoi Park. “But [the police, judiciary, and media] were too afraid to go against the people. People are sick and tired of this happening over and over again ... It was like a compilation of everything that has been going on for the last ten years. If you have power, you just get away with it. If you have money, people will find a way to get out. It has happened so many times.”

The hasty impeachment of Park was partly motivated by a lingering resentment toward her conduct after the 2014 *Sewol* ferry tragedy. The vessel, which had sailed from Incheon and was heading south to Jeju, began to sink in the morning. It was within sight of the coast of Mokpo, but the rescue attempt had been hopeless. Park herself had taken hours to respond, remaining in her bedroom for most of the day. British journalist Andrew Salmon explained to me that the downside to running a government that, in the past, had appeared to have magic powers to create an economy from scratch, as Park’s father’s had done, was that when things went wrong, the populace was notably unforgiving. “There was the feeling that, ‘Well, if the government can do magic, the fact that they didn’t save those kids [means it] must have been deliberate.’ I remember one reporter saying that if the

president's daughter had been on the *Sewol*, those kids would have been rescued ... You can say all sorts of shit when you're angry and emotional, and no one is going to hold you to account for it later."

I had heard this characterization of the Koreans from Japanese acquaintances many times before: that they were emotional, impetuous, unstable, drawn to the comfort of the crowd and collective expressions of feeling. It had seemed borderline racist to me, but when I asked the Koreans I interviewed about this, every single one happily agreed. They *are* an emotional people. They *do* have an unusual propensity to want to gather together in large numbers.

Tei Tai-kin described the Koreans as having "a kind of herd mentality." He used a word, *skinship*, which I had never heard before. "It's a Japanese-English word. It refers to very close bodily contact, physical contact, to show that there is an emotional friendship. When people like to be close to each other in a crowd. When that happens, they are easily manipulated by propaganda." There is actually a Korean word with a meaning close to this, *chung*, meaning group consciousness, but with a moral aspect: collectivity is good; standing together benefits the country as a whole.

"I would definitely agree with the Japanese people," Stephanie Sehoi Park said. "We are very emotional. We have a lot of love, lots of feelings. Everything is so intense. I think everyone would agree that we're emotional. But I think we are the friendliest out of all the East Asian countries." She mentioned the Korean word *simjeong*, meaning "mind evidence," or a gut feeling that can lead to perhaps questionable justice, but will also, she believes, one day lead to Park being pardoned before completing her sentence.

Jang Han-la, an anthropology student I met while I was in Seoul, placed the Koreans in the middle of a sliding scale of Far Eastern emotionality. "Of course Koreans are more emotional than Japanese, but maybe a little less than Chinese. That seems to be using 'emotional' negatively, but I think rationality is not always the number one priority. Emotion was the key to driving people to get to know more about the situation in the case of the former president Park." Jang argued the impeachment was, nevertheless, still "the democratic will of the people, a proper democratic process."

Ota Shimpei, a Japanese anthropologist I spoke to who has taught in Korea, had a different take on all this. He believes that the Japanese are every bit as emotional as the Koreans, saying, “And think about it—which country invented karaoke?” He has a point. The Japanese are pretty big on public demonstrations too. Whenever I visit Tokyo, there is always a crowd protesting outside one or another of the ministries, or the Diet. What’s more, the most openly emotional, demonstrative people you see on the streets of Japan are the far-right protestors, like the ones who had driven past me in Yokohama, or who shout and scream outside of Zainichi schools and Korean restaurants. It is quite an irony that the anti-Koreans are the most Korean of all the Japanese.

When I had suggested to Mada Yoko, the right-wing YouTuber I’d met in Fukuoka, that Japan’s rather constipated political sphere could learn a great deal from the peaceful, democratic mass-protests in Seoul against the corrupt rule of Park Guen-hye, she brushed me aside: “That’s what happens all the time in Korea. Every president gets assassinated, or put in jail. They are so extreme, they go by emotions. We’re like, ‘Oh, again?’ That’s just Korean culture to get rid of a bad guy.” Unfortunately, Mada is kind of right. What was happening with Park was a fairly typical course of events for the Koreans. Impeachment, scandal, corruption, imprisonment: These are as much a regular feature of the Korean political landscape as Congressional corruption is in the United States. Two former South Korean presidents are currently behind bars, for instance, and that’s not unusual. Here is a list of South Korea’s postwar leaders and what became of them:

Syngman Rhee (in power 1948–1960). The first president after the war, installed by the Americans. An authoritarian accused of vote-rigging. Fled to Hawaii following public protest, where he later died.

Park Chung-hee (1961–1979). Brutal military dictator. Assassinated by his security chief.

Chun Doo-hwan (1980–1988). Responsible for the Gwangju Massacre; tried for treason and mutiny. Sentenced to life in prison; pardoned.

Roh Tae-woo (1988–1993). Associate of Chun. Tried for treason, sedition, and mutiny. Sentenced to twenty-two years; pardoned.

Kim Young-sam (1993–1998). First democratically elected president and the first of a trio of largely admired presidents. Career ended with the Asian financial crisis and a humiliating IMF loan. Not charged with anything himself, but his son was jailed for corruption.

Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003). First president from an opposition party. His government made massive secret payments to North Korea to secure a summit (and earn him a Nobel prize). Not charged with any crimes, but two of his sons were jailed for bribery.

Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008). Impeached in 2004 but carried on in office. Later committed suicide by jumping from a cliff amid—actually comparatively minor—allegations of corruption.

Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013). Former mayor of Seoul and CEO of Hyundai. Sentenced to fifteen years in prison in October 2018, having been found guilty of charges related to multimillion-dollar corruption, bribery, and secret slush-funds (some of this involving, yet again, Samsung).

Park Geun-hye (2013–2017). Sentenced to twenty-five years on corruption charges in 2018.

Will Moon Jae-in, the new president and, currently at least, architect of a sensational rapprochement with North Korea, buck the trend and retire on a high? “He’s going to be impeached, or there will be an attempt,” Michael Breen said without hesitation when I asked him about the new president’s prospects. “Every Korean president, every single one, is disgraced or a lame duck by their fourth year in office.”

Back at election night in the center of Seoul, the small crowd and I wait, watching the show on the lawns of Sejongdo. Korean TV news is famed for its use of computer graphics, and one of the channels has superimposed the heads of the presidential candidates on the bodies of battling *Game of Thrones* characters. Finally the news comes in that with Park’s party split, as expected Moon Jae-in has breasted the tape with 41 percent of the vote. The next day several of the chaebol have taken out full-page ads in the national newspapers congratulating him on his win.

I have to admit, Breen's prediction seemed ridiculous at the time, but some months later, as I write, and despite the progress in negotiations with the North, Moon's approval rating has dropped to a low of 49 percent from a high point of 78 percent just a few months ago. His fate would seem very much to depend on the caprices of Kim Jong-un, not to mention Donald Trump.

SEOUL IV

I think we can all sympathize with Cho Hyun-ah. We've all been there. In December 2014 the poor, unsuspecting woman was sitting in her Korean Air business class seat waiting for her transatlantic flight from JFK to Seoul to take her back home for Christmas, when suddenly she found herself embroiled in a simply horrific incident.

One of the flight attendants—through oversight or quite deliberately, we may never know—served Cho some macadamia nuts, not on a plate, but *in a bag*. And then acted as if he had done nothing wrong.

As any right-thinking person would, Cho took grave offense, remonstrating with the witless attendant, and ordering—well, *screaming* for, really—him to kneel and beg forgiveness before her, and insisting the flight to return to the gate. This delayed its departure and the subsequent journey home for Christmas for the hundreds of other passengers on board, but that couldn't be helped. One must take a stand.

You would think that a measured response such as this would be applauded, so it must have been quite a shock for Cho, who was head of cabin service for all Korean Air flights at the time, when she was charged with breaking aviation laws, and eventually given a suspended sentence. I know, justice! Amiright?

By all accounts, Cho's siblings are similarly conscientious strivers for corporate excellence. Her younger sister, Cho Hyun-min, hit the headlines in 2018 for a water-throwing tantrum when an employee of an advertising company contracted to Korean Air displeased her during a meeting. She was charged with assault and questioned by police for fifteen hours. She did scream, she admitted, but the glass she had thrown was empty and it was targeted at a wall, not a person. And the other glass she threw, the one full of plum juice, that was just an accident. The charges were dropped.

A few years earlier, her brother, Cho Won-tae, had also come under fire for pushing a seventy-seven-year-old woman in a road rage incident. He was later reported to have ordered the pilot of a Korean Air flight to stop his announcements because they were disturbing the computer game he was playing (I think we can all sympathize with that one too).

The three Cho siblings sound nice, don't they? Their mother is a peach as well. She has been questioned by police in the past regarding allegations that she abused employees verbally and physically—doubtless yet more trumped-up charges. The patriarch of this wonderful family at the time was Cho Yang-ho, the second generation chairman of Korean Air, part of a family-run conglomerate, the Hanjin Group, founded by his father, Cho Choong-hoon.

“As chairman of Korean Air, as well as a father, I feel terrible about the immature actions of my daughters,” Mr. Cho said in a statement after their various conniptions were made public. “Everything is my fault and my wrongdoing. I apologize to the people.” But Mr. Cho, who died in April 2019, was being rather coy about his own achievements. He had previously been convicted of tax evasion, and at the time of his death was on trial for corruption. His three children had all been fast-tracked to executive positions in the company, doubtless based entirely on their own personal merits and abilities. Cho Hyun-ah, or the “nut rage heiress” as she was quite unfairly dubbed, returned to work in the company managing their hotels.

The Hanjin Group is a chaebol, a type of family-owned conglomerate these days unique to South Korea. The behavior of Hanjin's scions is not unusual and is part of the reason the chaebol are considered a major problem for the nation.

The chaebol's origins go back to Japanese rule, when the occupiers embarked on a massive, government-controlled industrial expansion using its own conglomerate model, the *zaibatsu* (*chaebol* and *zaibatsu* both translate as "wealth clan"). The American occupiers of Japan dismantled the monopolies of the *zaibatsu* within five years of the end of World War II because they were seen as anti-democratic. Ironically, many chaebol were founded in Korea using the assets taken from these Japanese companies after 1945, and from the 1960s to the 1980s their activities were closely guided by the president. Park Chung-hee decided which industries would be favored with beneficial trade terms, domestic monopolies, and cheap loans from state-controlled banks. He also selected which sectors of the economy they should focus on, starting with the so-called "white product" industries of cotton, flour, and sugar (and weirdly, wigs, which were a big export in the early days), before progressing to cement, chemicals, textiles, and fertilizers. Park would say "Steel!" the chaebol would say "How much?" and bingo—South Korea had the world's largest steel-production plant. Park was very much in control; on one occasion he forced businessmen who had displeased him to walk through the streets bearing placards that read "I am a corrupt swine." He decided South Korea should move into shipbuilding, and the country eventually became the world's largest shipbuilder. The automotive and electronics industries followed. Japan's own postwar manufacturing growth was the model, and in a sense the motivation too. In the early 1960s there were poster campaigns exhorting the South Koreans to "Beat Japan"; during that decade South Korea's so-called industrial soldiers helped increase exports by 1,340 percent, compared to 200 percent in Japan. At times South Korea very much resembled the centrally planned communist model used in the North, except for the fact that the workers never got a sniff of owning the means of production (although neither did workers in the North, of course), but there is no denying that the chaebol played a key role in the country's recovery.

Some assumed that the Asian economic crisis of 1997 would mean the end of the chaebol—the won, the South Korean currency, lost half its value and the IMF imposed new corporate governance rules as a condition of its bailout loans. Many chaebol did indeed go bust, including the fifth largest,

Daewoo, but the chaebol endured, and by 2011 the country had bounced back, recording its first-ever trillion-dollar year of overseas trade. Today forty-five chaebol remain. The five largest—Samsung, Hyundai, LG, SK, and Lotte—account for over half of South Korea’s annual GDP.

There are numerous reasons Moon Jae-in wants to reform the chaebol, though many are predicting that their practices will bring about South Korea’s economic doom. Their problems are twofold: structural and cultural. Structurally, their cross-shareholding practices mean that a ruling family might on paper only own 2 percent of a company but still have a controlling majority share and treat it essentially as a private entity, milking it for all it’s got. Lotte, a chaebol with interests in everything from construction to confectionary, whose ninety-five-year-old founder was recently sentenced to four years in prison for embezzlement (he avoided cell time on health grounds), is particularly notorious for this structure, which is called “tunneling.” In the case of Samsung, tunneling meant that the family’s third-generation heir, Lee Jae-yong, was able to take a \$6 million loan from his dad and transform it into the controlling stake in a company worth over \$300 billion. It also means that the ruling families often behave like emperors, but avoid responsibility when things go wrong.

Many of the chaebol are now suffering from the curse of the third generation, “the spoiled children,” as economist Young Ruk-chuk put it to me. Usually the chaebol heirs are relatively careful about conspicuous displays of wealth, privilege, or tantrums, at least while they are at home in Korea; they prefer to let rip while at their Malibu beach houses or Knightsbridge duplexes. Sometimes, though, as with the Chos, they can’t control themselves. One of the most badly behaved has been Kim Dong-seon, the third son of the Hanwha Group chairman, who has an unfortunate tendency to get drunk and belligerent. Visiting a Gangnam bar with company lawyers in 2017, he demanded they call him “Mr. Shareholder,” slapping one of them and grabbing another female employee by the hair. “From now on, treat me with respect,” he was reported to have slurred. Earlier in the year he had been arrested in another bar for hitting two waiters.

Which brings us to the second reason most agree reform is needed: the way the chaebol treat their employees. Many chaebol operate on rigid, top-down hierarchies. Employees often progress according to seniority and longevity rather than merit or intelligence. The chaebol tend not to reward initiative, but rather punish failure. This fosters risk-averse working environments in which employees and entire departments do their best to remain unnoticed, treating other departments as the enemy. The way employees address one another mimics traditional Confucian family hierarchy forms, which can be quite demeaning: managers will call executives “older brother,” for instance. Bosses have been known to bully, beat, and berate those beneath them. Stories of abuse—the *gap-eul* (senior-junior) approach is legion.

President Moon has increased the minimum wage and brought down the maximum permitted work week from sixty-eight to fifty-two hours, but South Koreans are still among the hardest-working people in the world—2,113 hours per annum, compared to 1,681 in the UK and 1,790 in the United States (yet productivity per capita is low, \$33 per hour for Korea in 2016, compared with \$63 for the United States—all this according to the OECD). One other lamentable aspect of Korean corporate culture is gender equality: women make up less than 3 percent of listed company board members (Japan is barely better, with 4 percent, compared to 19 percent in the United States), and South Korea comes last in the OECD’s gender pay-equality ranking (Japan is third from the bottom).

Eric Surdej, a Frenchman who worked as a director of LG Electronics in Seoul, recently published a tell-all book, *These Koreans Are Crazy!*, about his decade working for the chaebol. He revealed a torrid, cultlike working environment. Surdej once saw a company president hurl a pile of documents at an employee’s head, for instance. It took him a while to adjust to Korea’s corporate drinking culture too: “I had to drink for four hours, sitting outside in the bone-chilling cold [while on a corporate team-building weekend]. The drinking session led to pledges of allegiance to LG. It reminded me of a pagan ritual,” he writes. On another occasion, one of his colleagues collapsed and was rushed to the hospital, where he had to undergo an operation. The first thing the man asked upon waking was how

soon he might return to work. “It was a sad self-portrait of Koreans who ... take it for granted to sacrifice themselves for the organization they belong to,” writes Surdej.

All recent South Korean presidents have come to power pledging to rein in the chaebol families. In 2014 President Park did introduce some restrictions on cross-shareholding, and over the years, the chairmen of Hyundai, SK, Lotte, and Samsung have all been convicted of various crimes, but then pardoned. It doesn't help that the South Korean media is extremely cautious about challenging the chaebol simply because they depend on their advertising budgets, and other funds, for their survival. One Korean economist told me that if even the tenth-largest chaebol pulled its advertisements from a particular Korean newspaper, that newspaper would not be able to survive. Hardly surprising, then, that in a 2017 Pew Research Center survey, only 36 percent of Koreans felt that their newspapers were reporting the news accurately, compared to 65 percent in Japan. Evidence of the incestuous relationship between the South Korean media and the chaebol came recently when text messages and emails from journalists to an executive at Samsung were revealed. In these messages, the journalists asked for help in getting their children jobs or increases in sponsorship money. “We'll reward you with good articles,” one wrote.

So why are the chaebol tolerated? Because the South Korean economy is unusually dependent on exports (78 percent compared to the OECD average of 56 percent) and relies on their continuing success. “They have brilliant synergies,” Andrew Salmon, the British journalist who lives in Seoul, told me. “And they've globalized extremely successfully, with great marketing these days, great branding, pretty good pricing, good products. They're really good. They've got it all apart from the governance issue, that is their Achilles' heel.”

The strength of the chaebol has been that it only takes the man at the top to make a decision for it to be implemented, unimpeded by bureaucracy or any need for consensus. In the 1990s, for instance, Samsung's chairman took a gamble on semiconductors, which has earned the company over six billion dollars in profits. Samsung, which started off as a sugar producer during the Japanese colonial era, now makes components not just for its

own products but for archrivals like Apple (the iPhone X uses Samsung displays and memory chips). The company is now the world's largest maker of semiconductors and has a virtual monopoly on organic light-emitting diodes (OLED)—super-thin screens. Famously, South Koreans can live in a Samsung apartment, be treated at a Samsung hospital, have fun at a Samsung amusement park, and shop for goods shipped by Samsung container ships to a Samsung-owned retailer. They can buy a Samsung car (made with Renault) with money borrowed through a Samsung credit scheme, and use Samsung-refined gas to fuel it. They can even buy a Samsung smartphone.

Today Samsung encompasses around sixty different commercial entities that together constitute around 28 percent of the value of the Korean stock market, but since 2014 it has experienced a few hiccups. In 2014 Lee Kun-hee, the chairman and son of the company's founder, suffered a heart attack. He has been hidden away in a Samsung-owned hospital ever since, and, echoing the North Korean playbook, there are rumors that his death is being kept secret because of issues relating to the succession of the company—South Korea has an inheritance tax rate of 50 percent. Samsung has also repeatedly been found guilty of bribery and price fixing, and fined hundreds of millions of dollars in the United States and Europe; it has been caught ripping off designs by, among others, Kodak (digital technology), Sharp (flat-screen TVs), and of course Apple (iPhones and iPads); and then came 2016's Galaxy Note 7 debacle, when the devices started bursting into flames and were banned by many airlines. Millions of them were recalled at a cost of over four billion dollars. It is hard to imagine another company surviving its products being the focus of a safety warning at the commencement of every single commercial flight on earth for several months, but Samsung has continued to flourish.

Even the conviction in 2017 of Lee Kun-hee's son and presumed heir, Lee Jae-yong (aka Jay Y. Lee), for bribery and corruption in connection with the impeachment of President Park and his sentencing to five years in prison has had no impact on the company's fortunes. Indeed, Samsung's share price rose 65 percent, hitting a record high, and it posted record operating profits of \$14.1 billion for the last three months of that year, up

63 percent from the previous year. Meanwhile, the new Galaxy 8 sold 270,000 units in South Korea in its first weekend, compared to 160,000 for the Galaxy 7. As a result, Samsung went from tenth to seventh on *Forbes's* 2018 list of the “World’s Most Valuable Brands.”

Such is the company’s domination of its home market that it wasn’t until January 2018 that Apple opened its first store in South Korea. It opened in Gangnam, not far from Samsung’s headquarters, a massive towering stack of malevolent black glass cubes. Outside the headquarters when I visit is a permanent-looking protest camp built from scaffolding and black tarpaulin, with generators, a PA system, and a kitchen area. Inside the tent (with my shoes left neatly outside), I chat with some of the protestors. These are former Samsung employees who claim that the company is responsible for the deaths of seventy-nine of its workers. There have been unaccountable clusters of leukemia, multiple sclerosis, and brain tumors among workers at Samsung plants, but the company will not even talk to representatives of the relatives, one of the protestors tells me. “What has Lee Jae-yong done for Samsung workers? ‘NOTHING’” reads one of their banners. (Their protest had been going on for eleven years, but was finally resolved at the end of 2018, with Samsung paying a hundred thousand dollars to each of the victims.)

Afterward, I visit Samsung’s “d’Light” showroom, as it is called, in the basement of their headquarters. The only Samsung product in my house is an infuriatingly slow and overly complex television of whose functions I have a very limited grasp. Often I have to call for a child to help start it. But I entered the showroom with an open mind, and I was excited to get to sample virtual reality for the first time in my life. In the middle of the store, in a small fenced-off area, were two car seats mounted on plinths in which visitors could sit, like the targets in a fairground dunk tank, wearing what looked like a snorkel mask that projected (?) a film from a roller coaster. It wasn’t very good, really. It made me feel mildly nauseous. I was similarly nonplussed by another interactive “experience,” which involved me answering questions on a touch screen in order to divine something or other about my personality. This resulted in a photo that the machine had grabbed of me—squinting unedifyingly at its screen—being displayed on a much

larger screen across one wall of the store along with the message: “Hi Michael. You are thoughtful, calm and insightful. If you follow your heart, you can find out what you’re really capable of.”

The next day, I follow my heart to Professor Park Sangin, a vocal advocate of chaebol reform. We meet at his office in Seoul University’s economics department, part of a vast and beautiful campus sprawling over a hillside densely covered in lush greenery and huge, rambling, flowering bushes.

Park believes that if the Moon government fails to reform the chaebol, the country could end up like Venezuela or Argentina. “Korea will follow that vicious cycle of Latin America because, first of all, the economy is not as big as Japan’s so we cannot have long-standing stagnation,” he tells me. South Korea is too dependent on manufacturing and exports. “The economy is very vulnerable to a concerted effort by the nationalized industries in China to price Korean goods out of entire sectors. It happened with shipbuilding over the last decade, and the impact is exaggerated by the structure of the chaebol.” The third generation of owners are well aware of the destructive potential of what they are doing, but are afraid of losing everything. They are hindering the economy from moving away from industries in which the Chinese are expanding aggressively—cars, electronics, ships, steel, construction, and petrochemicals—thanks to their advantages of cheap labor, bottomless government funds, and centralized planning. South Korea is still exporting high-tech components to China, but that advantage will not last for much longer.

The chaebol are also thieves, he believes. “There is a huge problem with small companies coming up with good ideas and then the chaebol taking away their intellectual property,” says Park, in his early forties, dressed in a gray polo shirt and chinos. “Legally it is very difficult to fight them. The patent system doesn’t work here. If someone steals an idea or intellectual property, even if the business sues and wins in court, they will receive a very small portion of the money.”

Stephanie Sehoi Park, the young journalist I talked with about the anti-Park demonstrations, said something similar: “If there is a small company with a great idea, Samsung can just buy either the company itself or the

building they are in. The conglomerates take up everything.” In 2016 the OECD reported that, as a result of this kind of thing, only 0.01 percent of small South Korean start-ups become midsize companies.

The chaebol have huge influence in the legal and political systems too. According to a 2018 Real Meter survey, 89 percent of South Koreans believe their state prosecutors are corrupt in one way or another, and it is not unheard of, Park Sangin tells me, for draft legislation to be leaked to the relevant chaebol before it goes beyond committee level. And, as in Japan, lawmakers and government bureaucrats often move on to board positions or consultancies with the chaebol after they retire as a reward for assisting them.

“You know that if you do something helpful for the chaebol, especially Samsung, Samsung will take care of your retirement. Your life will be much easier,” says Park Sangin. He wasn’t convinced by Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong’s conviction for bribery in the President Park scandal, and predicted that Lee would soon be free again. “Almost all of the chaebol owners have committed serious economic crimes and go to jail once or twice, and they don’t serve the full time; they are all pardoned. In Korea we say that if you have money, you are not guilty; if you have no money, you are guilty.”

Though he reportedly had to endure watching an LG television in his cell rather than a Samsung one, and despite his case having originally been described as “the epitome of collusion between business and government,” Lee Jae-yong, South Korea’s third-richest man, was indeed freed from jail in early 2018 on his first appeal, having never even given up his vice chairmanship of Samsung. Afterward, the *Chosun Ilbo*, South Korea’s bestselling newspaper, ran an editorial warning against attacking the chaebol, and defending Lee—basically saying the president asked him for money and if he hadn’t given it, Samsung would have suffered. And we wouldn’t want that, now, would we?

Lee’s release was timed to coincide with the start of the 2018 Winter Olympics, held in South Korea, and thus the story was soon engulfed by the coverage of the largest sporting event held in the country since the 2002 FIFA World Cup. The last time I saw him on the news, in late 2018, he was

attending a state dinner in Pyongyang, sitting just a few feet from the presidents of both North and South Korea.

SEOUL V

Whether the chaebol are entirely to blame or not, one thing we do know for sure is that the South Koreans are deeply unhappy. According to the 2018 United Nations World Happiness report, they rank 57th out of 106 countries, and they do even worse when the happiness is adjusted for wealth.¹ South Korea has the highest suicide rate in Asia, and is usually among the top five suicide nations globally.

Eunkook Mark Suh is a Korean psychologist who specializes in happiness. His research has encompassed topics such as “Does physical attractiveness buy happiness?” and “Does Honorific Raise Your Positive Mood: Interrelation Between Language Form and Affect Valence” (in other words, do the Koreans’ strict age- and social status–related forms of address make them miserable?). I went along to meet Dr. Eunkook in his narrow, book-filled office in the Department of Psychology and Social Psychology at Yonsei University, a rather imposing ivy-clad building with a crenelated clock tower.

I am fortunate enough to live in Denmark, which is usually among the top five happiest countries in the world according to the United Nations. Superficially, the Danes are actually quite a grumpy, suspicious bunch, but I can imagine how they might feel themselves to be “content” or “satisfied” with their lives. I wondered if the problem might be that different nations

interpret the notion of happiness in different ways. Is that why the Koreans, who are so rich and free compared to most nations, do so badly on these lists?

“Ultimately, what Koreans or Danes or what all these people are trying to establish in their lives is strikingly similar,” Dr. Eunkook, a slight fellow dressed as if for a day’s yachting in jeans and deck shoes, begins. “They want to be powerful, they want to be recognized as an important figure. The only difference, the tricky part, is how we need to play a different cultural game to reach those desires.” In my experience, being powerful and recognized as important were not especially priorities for the Danes. Did Koreans place a greater importance on status, perhaps because of their Confucian heritage?

“I don’t believe there’s any person, whether you are a member of an African tribe or whatnot, who desires to be considered as a loser in the group, but yes, there are differences. One cultural variable that is very much related to happiness across nations is individualism, and the essence of individualism is you’re kind of trained mentally to live your life and not care too much about how other people evaluate your life. That mentality is very beneficial for maintaining a high sense of happiness because you don’t need validation from other people. It’s none of their business,” says Dr. Eunkook. The opposite is the case in most Asian cultures, especially Korea, and according to Dr. Eunkook, this is perhaps their greatest source of stress and unhappiness:

“Everybody meddles in your life here. It is always someone else calling the shots. You’re supposed to do this, you’re wrong if you do that, and so you get very much sensitized to how others constantly value you. Sometimes my valuations may not be consistent with how other people see me. I may think things are fine, but others think I am living a lousy life.

“Koreans have this very strong need for social approval. You need to *demonstrate* your success, not for yourself, but for your family. A lot of East Asians care more about how they are evaluated by other people. I think this may be in part Confucianism.”

The Confucian pressure to live up to other’s opinions and values and then precision-place yourself within the social hierarchy according to your

status and age must be exhausting. The rampant individualism of Western cultures leads to all sorts of other psychological pressures, but at least there is the option for individuals to interpret their “success” on their own terms. We can say, “Fuck it” and opt out of having to be rich, beautiful, and successful, yet still put on a fairly convincing show of being happy, but in Asian cultures, as Dr. Eunkook puts it, “There are going to be very few winners, by definition. A lot of people will feel relatively inferior.” Similarly, Michael Breen believes South Koreans have “an extreme sensitivity to the views of others ... there in every waking moment.”

A couple of years ago a South Korean Zen Buddhist monk, Haemin Sunim, began offering pearls of wisdom on social media to help people deal with the pressures of modern life. He built up such a following that his aphorisms were turned into one of those books with lots of white space and fifty words per page (which I often think I should get into writing). His book, *The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down*, published in Korea in 2012, stayed at number one on the bestseller list for almost a year.

In particular, Haemin seems to recognize the pressure of others’ expectations on Koreans, writing several entreaties about choosing your own religion and life partner, including:

Do not select your career based on what others will think of your choice. The truth is that other people do not really think about you that much.

And

Above all, please understand that what makes you feel tense and awkward is ... the pressure from your family to conform.

Refreshingly, Dr. Eunkook has little time for Haemin. In fact, he has little time for happiness as a life goal at all. “Actually, I think it’s crap, because, sadly, we’re not designed to be happy. *Homo sapiens*, we’re like birds or animals, and they’re not designed to be happy, right? From an evolutionary perspective, happiness is just a tool, a sort of signal to direct

you to seek resources which were essential for your survival. When do we feel happy? When we eat or have sex. That's just a signal that you are a functioning human being."

You cannot discuss happiness in Korea without mentioning the concept of *han*. I have seen *han* described variously as a suppressed grudge, helpless rage, unrequited resentments, or an eternally brooding sense of grievance, most oddly one that the Koreans would actually prefer remained unresolved. *Han* is to Koreans what *hygge* is to Danes—omnipresent, intangible, understood by all, accepted as an intrinsic part of being Korean. And like the Danes with *hygge*, the Koreans like to make out that *han* is untranslatable.

Stephanie Sehoi Park described *han* as "melancholy and bitterness. It is anger not expressed, directed at the world and at yourself, there is no specific target. No one knows where it came from. No one knows *why* it came here. No one knows how to resolve it, but yet ... it's there. It's not supposed to get a resolution. It's always been there and it will always be there."

Jonathan Kim, the Korean film producer, disagrees entirely: "People say, 'We cannot explain *han*, because it only exists in Korea.' That is bullshit. It is just a grudge, it's having a grudge!"

Song Sok-je, a South Korean poet and novelist whom I met for lunch one day in Seoul, also believes that *han* is universal: "It is something that accumulates within you when you are under some stress or when you go through a lot of hardship, like an internal wound. It can be expressed in all sorts of different art forms—dance, literature, singing, or some people cry and groan about the pain that they have within them, but I don't think this is something that just Koreans feel. Everybody in the world can relate to *han*."

Dr. Eunkook was similarly skeptical: "I don't think Koreans have any special brand of misery. It's a kind of hopelessness or depression which exists in all cultures, right? Maybe we made a big deal out of it because of our recent history, and it was used by the regimes to motivate people. I'm not saying it doesn't exist, but it's like kimchi. We make out [that it's] something special, but other cultures do have pickles, you know."

Is *han*—if it exists at all—a symptom of a kind of victim mentality, a legacy of the Japanese colonial rule, I wondered? In which case, might it even be described (quietly, without any Koreans overhearing) as an inadvertent *gift* from the Japanese—the avenging fuel that has fired the Koreans to postwar economic glory? In Tokyo I had spoken with the Zainichi academic Tei Tai-kin, about this. “The colonial rule by Japan was a negative experience,” he told me. “But after the war, the sense of humiliation was the stimulant that caused them to think that if Japan can do it, why not Korea?”

Stephanie Sehoi Park disagrees: “It started long before colonization. It might come from being a tributary state of China, but it has reached a point where we started enjoying it. We’re miserable and proud of it.” I am sure Korea’s centuries-long history of social oppression, poverty, invasion, and sexual discrimination even prior to that must be a factor. In Korea everyone knew their place, and stayed there; for centuries, women were not allowed to dine with men, there were curfews at night, and all Koreans had to wear ID tags—made of ivory for the elite, deer horn for the middle class, poplar wood for lower-ranking bureaucrats, and ordinary wood for the commoners. “In a Western sense, Koreans did not exist as individuals,” writes one Korean expert.

Jang Han-la is an anthropology student, currently specializing in gender studies, at Seoul University. I met this soft-spoken but enjoyably opinionated twenty-six-year-old in the park beside the National Assembly building. She didn’t go for my hypothesis that *han* had gained impetus from the Japanese occupation: “I think it has a kind of low, deep root from a long, long history. When we refer to *han*, it is rather like a sadness with a little bit of anger, but it’s different from that drive to compete with the Japanese; it’s different from an eagerness to be successful. There’s nothing positive about it.”

O Sonfa, the Korean-born pro-Japanese author I had met in Tokyo, had contrasted *han* with Japan’s *mono no aware*, a kind of wistfulness at the passing of time. “The Japanese just put everything in the water and let it flow,” she said, implying, I think, that the Japanese are better at accepting what fate brings and better at forgiving and forgetting misdemeanors.

Koreans, on the other hand, brood endlessly on both real and perceived injustices and work themselves up into what my grandmother would have termed “a right old lather.” “Koreans make a lament to themselves, they moan. Japanese don’t usually show the emotion, but that doesn’t mean they don’t have emotions,” O said.

It does seem likely that *han*—or at least, straightforward Korean misery—is in part perpetuated by South Korea’s high-pressure education system. According to the most recent international school assessment rankings (PISA, 2015), South Korean students rank seventh globally in math and reading, and eleventh in science, which is decent, albeit below China, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. But when it comes to students’ well-being, young Koreans score very badly indeed. Only half reported that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their lives (compared to global average of 71 percent), and 22 percent classified their lives as “low” in terms of satisfaction (versus the average of 12 percent). They all put huge pressure on themselves—82 percent said they wanted to be top of their class (compared to the average of 59 percent). Clearly something is amiss here. It may well be the infamous *hagwon*, the after-school crammers that many—perhaps the majority of—Korean children attend, often until late at night. The government has introduced legislation limiting the hours *hagwon* can operate; they are not supposed to teach between ten p.m. and five a.m. (Can you imagine having to *legislate* against that?) But *hagwon* are big business: according to one estimate, in 2009 they made more money than Samsung. There also seems to be something dispiriting about the way South Korean schools teach, with a Confucian emphasis on rote learning and students’ unquestioning acceptance of what they are taught. And *hagwon* tuition costs a fortune, so only wealthier parents can afford it, which means their children tend to do better on exams, get into the better universities, and get the best jobs, thus exacerbating and perpetuating South Korea’s rapidly growing economic inequality.

I noticed that, late at night, the Seoul subway was nearly always full of kids. One evening, I sat next to a boy in his mid-teens. He was obviously on his way to or from one of the thousands of *hagwon* in the city and was engrossed in a mathematics textbook, rocking gently backward and forward

in his seat, thumping his calf muscle with his free hand. Maybe this was some kind of memory technique to help him to cling to some facts in order to regurgitate them on an exam; maybe he was just slowly losing his mind.²

The most important school exam is the *Suneung* (College Scholastic Ability Test) the all-or-nothing university entrance exam held every November. Flights are redirected and roads closed where necessary to give the students peace when they take the examination, which decides whether they get into the four or five most prestigious universities, the top one being Seoul National University. A place at one of these is considered essential for a job in the chaebol. Failure condemns a young Korean not just to a second-tier university, but to a second-tier life, or at least that is the perception.

China has had a similar all-or-nothing college entrance exam system, the *gaokao*, for hundreds of years. Schools there have been known to set students up with energy-boosting amino acid saline drips when they take the exam. A first-year university student I met in Beijing later on in my trip told me how he had studied from six in the morning until late at night every day for three years in preparation for the two-day test, which takes place every June 7 and 8. He had been a good student, expected to do well, he told me, but hadn't lived up to those expectations. His score of 584 out of a possible total of 750 had not been enough for him to study languages at one of the top universities, Peking or Tsinghua, as he had hoped, so he had just started a business and economics degree at a second-tier university. What would a top score have meant to him? "You learn from the best lecturers and you get the opportunity to go and study abroad afterward; that is the big aim." Despite his experience, he believed the system worked well and, in a country with such an enormous population, that this kind of filtering is brutal but necessary. "It makes you tough," he told me. "If you can't do well in that, then maybe you don't deserve to do well in life." However, another Chinese college student I spoke to told me his schooling had been so tough that he had suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder: "Every night, nightmares, teachers torturing me. The pressure was intolerable," he recalled.

Jang Han-la, the South Korean anthropology student I met in Seoul, feels that because of the enormous cost of getting a good education and the competition in the chaebol-dominated jobs market post-graduation, young Koreans were increasingly conservative when it came to dreaming of their futures. She narrowed it down to just four choices for those coming to the end of their education: try to get one of the rare and precious jobs-for-life at the chaebol; keep studying, for which you needed to be relatively wealthy; go to law school (lawyers always flourish here); or take the exams for a government job. Ideas of entrepreneurship or traveling were a fantasy for the majority. When I mention the creative sector, which their previous president had emphasized as a priority for Korea's future, Jang laughed scornfully: "That's kind of empty rhetoric."

There was, however, a fifth option, which many young Koreans were choosing, she said: "To marry someone and raise kids costs so much, and it's so risky, so many are just choosing not to take the risk. They have seen how harsh it is to be a child here and how tough it is to give your child a proper education. So they give up. Give up on marriage, give up on love, give up on having kids."

SEOUL VI

A hundred or so high school children are sitting cross-legged, chattering on the sidewalk in a business district of Seoul. Each holds a yellow paper butterfly on a wooden stick. They laugh and preen into their phone cameras, adjusting their hair, pouting for selfies. It has the feeling of a sports day or class outing. One girl carries a tote bag with “Tokyo Street Girl” on it. Several have items bearing Hello Kitty logos.

A priest in heavy, ivory-white robes with a who-are-you-kidding combover hairdo (an arrangement known in this part of the world as a “barcode”) stands with his back to the teenagers behind a small lectern placed in the gutter. From the priest’s lectern hangs a scroll upon which is written “Japanese Military Sexual Slavery The Girls [sic] Memorial Church,” plus phone, Facebook, and web contact details. He is facing some gray billboards across the street, which shield a building site. Four busloads of riot police regard the scene from across the way.

Every Wednesday since 1992, protesters have been gathering here, just across the street from the Japanese embassy (currently being rebuilt, hence the building site), to campaign on behalf of the women who they say were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. The women are euphemistically referred to as comfort women (the term their movement most often uses); the yellow butterfly is their symbol.

The priest is speaking through a public address system. The children aren't paying a great deal of attention, but a few older Korean men and women listen intently. One man, in wraparound shades and a baseball cap, stares in the direction of the building site, gripping a small Korean flag. Around his neck hangs a banner with an aerial photograph of two rocky islets, which I recognize as the disputed Dokdo Islands/Takeshima. The photo has been doctored so that a gigantic flagpole bearing the Korean flag erupts from one of the islands.

Beside the priest is a bronze statue of a young, barefoot woman, seated beside an empty chair. Her hands are placed on her lap, but I look closer and notice that her fists are clenched. She is garlanded with yellow flowers and offerings have been placed at her feet. This is perhaps the most controversial public statue in the free world, a mute emblem of the seething enmity that continues to undermine what should be a firm alliance between prosperous, democratic, free-trading, peaceable neighbors: Korea and Japan. Erected in 2011, it was the first of the comfort women memorials, but many more are now popping up around the world. A few days earlier I had seen a replica outside the Japanese consulate in the southern city of Busan. There is one in Sydney too, another outside the Japanese embassy in Taipei, and recently here in Seoul replica statues have been placed on busses. There are several comfort women statues in the United States too; one was unveiled in New Jersey in May 2018.

The comfort women system was set up by the Japanese army in the early 1930s, partly to combat the spread of venereal disease among its soldiers but also to lessen the number of rapes perpetrated on the civilians of the countries they conquered. Estimates of the total number of comfort women enslaved by the Japanese during the war range from 20,000 to 200,000, although some Korean and Chinese sources put the figure at over 400,000; a few years ago, a BBC documentary settled on 80,000 to 100,000 women.

Up to 80 percent of the comfort women are believed to have died from injuries incurred during their imprisonment, from diseases contracted from the soldiers or when, at the end of the war, some were forced to commit suicide or killed by their captors. Of those that survived, many were unable

to have children and were shunned by their communities. Today there are fewer than forty former comfort women in Korea, the youngest of whom is now well into her eighties.

Women were taken from other countries Japan invaded. Tomasa Dioso Salinog, the most prominent Filipino comfort woman, was thirteen when her father was killed by a Japanese soldier and she was abducted to a comfort station. One Dutch woman, Jan Ruff-O'Herne, was taken by the Japanese while living in Indonesia, then the Dutch East Indies. In 2008 Ruff-O'Herne testified alongside several Asian comfort women at a US congressional hearing.

A Japanese writer, Senda Kako, was the first to investigate Japan's military brothel system. In 1962 he was editing a collection of photographs taken during the war for a Japanese national newspaper, the *Mainichi Shimbun*; the photos had previously been banned from publication. Among the 25,000 pictures, Senda found one of two women crossing a river, taken during the Battle of Xuzhou in 1938. It struck him as odd that women had been there at all, but he soon discovered that they were comfort women. Senda published a book about his findings in Japan in 1973, but the comfort women issue was not really discussed in the South Korean media or by its politicians until after democratization in the late 1980s, when freedom of the press improved greatly. Part of the reason for the silence was that the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations restored relations between the two countries, and Japan had paid South Korea \$900 million in reparations, equivalent to three times Korea's national budget at the time. Most of the money ended up being diverted to infrastructure investments by the Park Chung-hee government, so for many years, it was in both governments' interests to leave the matter alone. But in the 1990s, South Korean women's organizations began to campaign on the issue. That was when a Korean comfort woman, Kim Hak-sun, filed the first lawsuit against the Japanese government, testifying that in 1941, at age seventeen, she had been taken by Japanese soldiers and raped between thirty and forty times every day for a year. In 1992 Japanese historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki of Chuo University unearthed further supporting documents of the official program in the Japanese state archives. Yoshimi's discoveries prompted an inquiry by the

Japanese government, and as a result, the then chief cabinet secretary, Kato Koichi, made a statement that admitted the Japanese government's guilt in the establishment of the comfort stations and expressed its "sincere apology and remorse." While on a visit to Seoul the same year, the then Japanese prime minister, Miyazawa Kiichi, made another official statement, which included the following:

"We should never forget our feelings of remorse over this ... As prime minister of Japan, I would like to declare anew my remorse at these deeds and tender my apology to the people of the Republic of Korea."

In 1993 the Japanese government undertook another, more detailed inquiry following the discovery of 123 new documents relating to the comfort women, and issued another formal apology, written in close cooperation with the Korean government. It was offered by the then chief cabinet secretary, Kono Yohei. The Kono Statement, as it became known, is recognized as the high point in relations between the two countries on this matter. It read:

The Japanese military was directly or indirectly involved in the establishment and management of the comfort stations and the transfer of "Comfort Women..." in many cases recruited against their will, through coaxing, coercion etc, and that, at times, administrative/military personnel directly took part in the recruitments.

It also included a promise to "face squarely" the historical fact and to teach about the occupation in schools, and the surviving comfort women were each sent a signed letter from the then prime minister of Japan, Hashimoto Ryutaro, which read: "As Prime Minister of Japan, I thus extend anew my most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women."

In 1995 the Japanese government set up the Asia Women's Fund to compensate the comfort women, but there was a catch, a legal technicality that has provoked at least some of the resentment of the campaigners to this

day. The compensation offered by the Japanese came from donations from private people, not the Japanese state. Had the money been official, it might have negated the various postwar treaties between Japan and the countries it had invaded and risked opening the floodgates to claims from anyone adversely affected by the actions of the Japanese military up until 1945. To move the issue forward quickly, the Japanese government accepted full moral responsibility but insisted that the right to claim material compensation had been dealt with by previous treaties. In fact, government money was used for the administration of the new fund, but most of the cash came from voluntary donations by Japanese people. Within a couple of months, 400 million yen (\$3.5 million) had been raised, but many of the comfort women refused to accept any payments from the fund. They still felt the Japanese government needed to compensate them further under the terms of international law.

Over the years many more comfort women have taken their cases to Japanese courts, usually represented by Japanese legal teams working for free. In each case, the courts have acknowledged the veracity of the women's claims but again concluded (often regretfully) either that the issue of state compensation had been settled by the previous treaties with China and Korea in 1952, 1965, and 1972, in which these countries renounced their claims for war reparations from Japan, or that a statute of limitations applied. The comfort women campaigners argued in return that those treaties only renounced the right of the Chinese and Korean *states* to sue Japan, not the right of individuals. The United Nations weighed in, pointing out that statutes of limitations do not apply to "gross violations of human rights."

Nevertheless, there have been numerous further statements of remorse and regret from Japanese prime ministers over the years, while Emperor Akihito, son of Hirohito, in whose name and under whose command the war was waged, has also done as much as he can within his limited sphere of expression to offer remorse for Japan's actions, leading one observer, Jeff Kingston, director of Asian studies at Temple University, Japan, to describe him recently as "Japan's leading emissary of reconciliation."

Often, though, these official apologies and expressions of remorse have been undermined; not all Japanese politicians have felt inclined to maintain a contrite tone, particularly in recent years. Several figures high up in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, tired of what they see as the South Koreans' insatiable, at times politically motivated demands for atonement, have called into question historical evidence about the comfort women. In 2012 then prime minister Noda Yoshihiko made a statement in the Diet that there was "no evidence" that the comfort women had been taken by force. Former mayor of Osaka Hashimoto Toru has also stated that "If Korea has this evidence, it would be good to see it." Ishihara Shintaro, former governor of Tokyo, said, "Prostitution is a good means of making money in times of difficulty, and the comfort women chose to do that." The current Japanese premier, Abe Shinzo, would seem to agree. In 2007, in a speech to the Diet, he said that "it was not as though military police broke into people's homes and took them away like kidnappers." Others claim that it would have been unthinkable for the Japanese military to have prioritized the maintenance of two hundred thousand sex workers during the height of their overseas campaigns when they were busy fighting the Chinese in China, the Americans in the Pacific, and the British in Burma. And, where were the Korean men when their women were being taken away? No, they say, the women *chose* a life of prostitution, and in many cases, the men who organized the brothels were Korean. This last point probably has some truth to it: By the 1940s, Korea had been Japanese territory for three decades. Koreans were involved in the running of the country at almost every level, including the military.

This is obviously controversial in South Korea. Occasionally, though, Korean academics do attempt to address the issue of collaboration. In her 2013 book *Comfort Women of the Empire*, Sejong University literature professor Park Yu-ha presented evidence that *some* of the Korean comfort women were employees of the comfort stations, and that the stations were, in some cases, run by Korean men and women. It was a more nuanced picture, but Park was taken to court for defamation by associates of nine former comfort women. She successfully defended the case at the District

Court level, but the High Court overturned that decision and fined her \$8,848.

Out in the murkier reaches of the internet, you will find people who say the entire comfort women issue is a Chinese conspiracy intended to weaken relations between Korea and Japan, and thus destabilize America's power in East Asia. Or is it the work of leftist Americans, aiming to nudge South Korea toward Communist China? Or North Korean infiltrators stirring up trouble in the South? Or is the whole thing a conspiracy by lawyers and NGOs out to make money from the saga? Naturally, such theories and denials infuriate the comfort women campaigners.

In 2006 a group of sixty-four former comfort women submitted a complaint to the Constitutional Court of Korea claiming that the government was derelict in its duties for not taking further action against Japan. The women won the case, and in 2015 the two countries again met around the negotiating table to try to resolve the problem once and for all. In the end, Abe Shinzo agreed that the Japanese government would pay 1 billion yen (\$6.8 million), this time from government funds, to the surviving comfort women on the condition that South Korea agreed to let the issue rest, and remove the comfort women statue from outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul.

As I had seen, the statue remains outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Not only that, but another one went up in Busan in 2016. In protest at what it considered was South Korea reneging on the agreement, Japan recalled its ambassador to Seoul. The Korean government responded that the statue was a civic matter, erected by private individuals and beyond their control (much like the statements and activities of Japanese ultra-nationalists, you could say). The Japanese foreign minister, Kono Taro—ironically, son of Yohei—issued a statement pointing out that Japan had kept its part of the bargain and now it was time for the Koreans to do likewise, but during the 2017 election, Moon Jae-in campaigned for the presidency with a pledge to review the 2015 agreement. “The Japanese government, the perpetrator, should not say the matter is closed,” he said. “The issue of a crime against humanity committed in a time of war cannot be closed with just a word. I do not seek special treatment from Japan. I ask

only that [Japan] walk alongside us into the future on the basis of heartfelt remorse and reconciliation, befitting our closest neighbor.” After his election, the review concluded that the deal was flawed because there was not proper consultation with the victims themselves, and that the apology was not “heartfelt.” The South Korean government dissolved the foundation that had been set up by the Japanese to support the comfort women and replaced the billion yen with its own funds, but its foreign ministry said that it would not attempt a renegotiation of the agreement. At least, not for now.

In late 2018 the focus shifted to the forced labor of Koreans by the Japanese during the occupation, as the South Korean Supreme Court ordered two Japanese companies—Sumitomo Metal Mining Co. and Nippon Steel Corporation—to pay compensation to Koreans who had worked for them in the early 1940s. Prime Minister Abe immediately rejected the demand as “impossible under international law,” but there are many more such cases pending in the South Korean courts.

The comfort women and forced labor issues are frequently employed by Korean politicians in election campaigns or when their approval ratings are waning: they are a guaranteed vote-winner, a subject all Koreans, left or right, pro-America or sympathetic to North Korea, can agree upon. It certainly seemed to work for Moon, and one imagines he might well employ it again in the future if his popularity wanes and the economy continues to stagnate.

In Seoul I met with the prominent novelist and poet Song Sok-je (also known as Song Sokze), author of several books, including *In the Shade of the Oleander*, which has been translated into English. I asked him what was wrong with the many apologies already offered by the Japanese to the comfort women. The Koreans seemed to characterize them as the “I’m sorry if you were offended” kind, or “I apologize if you were hurt”—sneaky equivocation.

“We didn’t really feel that there was much *truth* in their apologies, and every time they apologized, they didn’t phrase it right,” he said. “They say things like, ‘We think it’s our fault,’ or ‘We should say sorry,’ you know, that kind of phrasing that doesn’t really satisfy us Koreans. If they can’t

apologize properly, they should keep their mouth shut, but if they do apologize, then they should put their heart into it.”

What precisely should the Japanese say, if he could write the script?

“Maybe something along the lines of ‘We are sorry for putting Koreans through so much hardship and for killing Koreans, and then taking over the country by force, and also for not apologizing properly,’ and then promise they will never do anything like that again.”

It seems to me that this is pretty good summary of what the Japanese have said over the years, but according to a 2018 Genron NPO poll of one thousand people, only 1.1 percent of Koreans questioned felt the comfort women issue had been resolved, and nearly half felt “more discussion” was the way forward. In contrast, a 2016 Pew poll revealed that just over half of Japanese people thought they had apologized enough, and 17 percent felt that no apology was necessary at all, a figure that has not altered much over the last ten years, suggesting the hard-liners are stubborn if a minority, although the percentage of Japanese who did not feel Japan had apologized sufficiently had almost halved over the previous decade from 44 percent to 23 percent. It does seem even Japanese moderates are running out of patience on this issue.

It is not the place of an outsider to tell the Koreans to move on, but they *could*. When discussing this with South Koreans, whenever I mooted that they might try a more magnanimous approach, I would sense something stir deep within them. A light would go out. Their body language would shift. I would feel the air change. I couldn’t really understand what was happening, until I visited the House of Sharing.

★ ★ ★

I am standing in a comfort station, a dark, windowless, wooden hovel. On the wall hangs two rows of small wooden tablets, much like the ones which you see in traditional Japanese *izakaya* restaurants. In an *izakaya*, they would be the individual menu items. In the comfort station, they list the services offered by the women workers.

The room is a replica, one of the exhibits at the Museum of Sexual Slavery by Japanese Military, part of the House of Sharing complex in

Gwangju City, Gyeonggi Province, a different Gwangju from the scene of the 1980 uprising an hour south of Seoul. The complex is also home to some of the surviving victims.

“One more thing: you notice the washbasin?” asks Jeong Ho-cheol, who helps run the museum. “It is very utilitarian. It is not for the women’s comfort at all. The basin is where the woman would have to wash the rapist’s genitalia after she just got raped. And they would have to wash the same condom out. This is an actual condom from that time....” He gestures to a glass display case nearby, in which lies a desiccated lump of rubber, presumably reused countless times.

Some comfort stations housed ten women, some over a hundred. The women would often have to service more than forty men each day. Soldiers in the morning, NCOs in the afternoon, officers from seven to eight p.m., commanding officers at ten p.m. “Can you imagine having to have sex with more than forty men in one day?” Jeong asks me. “According to the testimony of one woman, she had done it with ten men, and so she was very painful in that part, so she refused more, but the owners tied her feet so she would have to continue.” There are many, many such stories, he says, often ending with the woman’s suicide.

As an example, he tells me about the thirty-five women taken from Korea to service the Japanese military occupying Papua New Guinea. Half of them died on the journey. Half of those who survived the journey died during their time in the comfort station from disease, botched abortions, trauma, or suicide. Only seven made it home at the end of the war.

The thirty comfort women who live here—at the House of Sharing, they prefer the name *halmoni* (“grandma”)—are all in their eighties and nineties, and in most cases extremely frail. Many still suffer from injuries caused at the time of their incarceration.

The House of Sharing lies on a quiet hillside amid woodland, with tomato and rice farms nearby. At its heart is a small amphitheater-style open space ringed with bronze busts of some of the current and former residents, including Kim Soon-deok, who drew the Unblossomed Flower, which became the symbol of the comfort women movement; Kim Hak-soon, the first woman to testify; and Park Doo-ri, born in 1924, who was among the

plaintiffs in the court at Shimonoseki, Japan, who unsuccessfully sought an official apology and reparations from the Japanese legal system in 2000. Inside the museum, which is beneath the amphitheater, one of the first things you see is a map showing all the comfort stations, stretching from Japan and Korea, through China, to Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and as far south as Papua New Guinea. The museum estimates the total number of comfort women to be between 50,000 and 300,000. According to the people who run it, 40 percent of visitors to the House of Sharing are Japanese.

One current resident is Lee Ok-sun. Born in 1927 in Busan, Lee came from a poor family, so she didn't attend school. In 1942 she was taken from her job at a local hotel by two Japanese men (sometimes reported as one Japanese man and one Korean man) dressed as civilians to Yanji in northwest China. "It was an occurrence that doesn't even happen in dreams," she recalled in a TV documentary. "We had no idea where we were going during the train ride. Instead of going straight to the comfort station like most girls, we were sent to do labor in a different place after being captured." The labor was hard, and the girls, some as young as eleven, complained. The Japanese soldiers said they would send them home, but instead they were sent to the first of many comfort stations where they would work over the following three years, until the end of the war.

Lee has described what she experienced as being "like a slaughterhouse for humans." Many of the young women she knew committed suicide by jumping off cliffs; one slit her own throat. During those three years, Lee received several injections of an anti-syphilis drug, as well as mercury vapor treatments that left her unable to have children. After the war, she remained in Jilin Province in China, settling there with a Korean man who had been conscripted into the Japanese military. The man was later enlisted into the Chinese military when the civil war started, and Lee moved in with her in-laws. She never saw her husband again, and she eventually remarried. Lee returned to South Korea to live in the House of Sharing in 2001.

Would I like to meet Lee Ok-sun? Jeong asks. He takes me to the nursing home a little farther up the hill. On the way, we pass a large statue

depicting an elderly woman, naked from the waist up, and submerged in the ground from the waist down, as if in quicksand.

The building looks like any other nursing home with a communal living room with armchairs ranged around its edge. Two elderly women are sitting apart from each other, on opposite sides of the room, in silence. I am introduced to one of them, who is Lee Ok-sun. She is slumped, penned in by her walker. Her eyes are closed and her chin rests on her chest. She is clearly extremely frail. I am told she has only been eating liquids for the past couple of days, unable to digest anything more, and in considerable pain. She is wearing purple trousers and a mauve top. She is barefoot. Her hair is a shock of white. In better years, Lee Ok-sun traveled the world to highlight the plight of the *halmoni*, meeting Holocaust survivors in Germany, testifying in Tokyo, and going to California to submit an affidavit to the California Federal Court to block the removal of a comfort woman statue in Glendale, Los Angeles.

A female carer squats down beside Lee and explains who I am. I hesitate to disturb her, but the carer nods that I should speak. I thank Lee for finding the time to meet me, and sympathize with her current condition. Then I ask if she has a message for the Japanese.

The question is translated, and it is as if a light has been switched on in Lee's eyes. Her face becomes animated as she speaks. The carer translates her response:

"The first thing I want is an apology. I don't want to die without getting an apology from the [Japanese] government. I have nothing I want to say to the people because it is not the people who are bad—it is the government who did this to me. I just want an apology from the government."

Previously she has said that she will not be satisfied until the emperor of Japan kneels in front of her to deliver the apology. Was this still the case? Lee has withdrawn again, but nods almost imperceptibly as she closes her eyes.

DMZ

The next day I drive east out of Seoul in my intermittently self-driving Kia. At one point, a couple of police motorcyclists appear alongside me on the highway. For a brief moment I wonder if my autonomous vehicle has reported me for some misdemeanor, but they merely wave me aside to make way for the newly elected president, Moon Jae-in himself, who, I learn later from the evening TV news, was somewhere within the fleet of armored Cadillac Escalades swooshing past me through the rain, on his way to launch the countdown to the Winter Olympics to be held a few months hence in Pyeongchang.

I spend the night in a hotel in Wonju, a prosperous-seeming city of highways and high towers. The rain has not stopped all day. From my hotel room window I watch a man alone on a golf course, putting through two-inch-deep puddles, the living embodiment of Korean determination.

The next morning I make it to the east coast road. This turns out to be one of those great ocean highways, snaking its way between stratified cliffs on my left and crashing waves on the right, with military lookouts up above and the occasional enticing crescent of sand. While the Japanese accessorize their holiday spots with Ferris wheels and aquariums, the Koreans prefer terrifyingly high-altitude zip wires. There had been one at the Mud Festival over on the west coast, and I pass another here that must

be a kilometer long and 90 feet high. South Koreans like a thrill ride, a bit of danger, it seems.

Which brings me to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), my destination today. This is the no-man's-land between North and South Korea, three miles wide and stretching 155 miles from the Yellow Sea coast in the west to here at Gangwon Province in the east, on the Japan Sea coast. I had heard that here on the east coast, you could drive to the border unaccompanied, which sounded more interesting than the stagey day trip by bus from Seoul.

I am getting closer to the DMZ now as I arrive at Unification Park, an outdoor exhibition space by the sea featuring a wooden boat used by eleven North Korean defectors in 2009, as well as a North Korean submarine captured off the coast here in September 1996. "The incident was a great shock to us and incurred our wrath," explains an information panel beside the red-and-green sub, a rackety, rusting Cold War trophy propped up on stilts. It was captured after the North Korean infiltrators signaled from the shore for the sub to come closer, and it ran aground. Inside, it is horribly cramped; bits of metal jut perilously at eye-level. I notice that some of the equipment has English-language signage.

Farther up the road is a military museum with more North Korean trophies—there is spying equipment captured from the submarine infiltrators, including Japanese cameras, binoculars, and rations, and pointed exhibitions about other countries that have managed to reunify, such as Vietnam and Germany. As I leave, I have a queasy feeling. The Ealing comedy aspects of North Korea are endlessly entertaining—the state-approved hairstyles, the Korean Central News Agency reporting in 2012 that they had discovered a unicorn's lair, or Kim Jong-il scoring eleven holes-in-one playing golf that time—but more than 25 million people live there and have endured appalling conditions over the past decades. In the early 1990s two million are believed to have died as a result of a famine caused by the government's intransigence, for instance. Though North Korea is believed to be experiencing economic growth of about 4 percent these days, many still live in poverty, and few have any freedom. And should Juche, the North's state ideology, be threatened, they would not

think twice about slaughtering their neighbors. North Korea has the world's fourth-largest army and is of course a nuclear power.

As I pass Goseong, the last town before the DMZ, the military posts are now manned and armed, and the beaches are lined with razor wire. I see a sign beside the highway. I do a double take. My eyes haven't deceived me. It really does read "To Moscow. To Be Continued...." During the Sunshine Policy era in the late 1990s, when relations were more transactional between North and South Korea, there were genuine hopes that Highway 7, as the coast road is known, would continue up through North Korea and on across Russia creating a properly pan-Asian link from Moscow to Busan. That may still come to pass, of course, as the current Moon administration is building friendly ties with the North faster than any previous administration, but for now, people must make do with the ferry from nearby Sokcho to Vladivostok.

In the final few miles to the border, life continues. Farmers tend their fields, there are residential towers and military bases by the sea. The air is thick with dragonflies, which splat on my windshield. As I enter the last mountain tunnel before the border, huge concrete blocks stand sentinel on either side of the highway—presumably waiting to be toppled over to block advancing soldiers.

Finally, I come to a military checkpoint. A couple of polite young soldiers lean in to my open window. Realizing I am not Korean, they pass me a laminated information card on which is written: "Do you have an application form?" I wasn't aware I needed one. I'm not planning on visiting North Korea, I joke. I must turn around, they say, stone-faced. It seems I have missed something called the Security Education Center, six miles back down the coast road, which turns out to be a facility for separating tourists from their money. I pay to show my passport, fill in a form, peruse the souvenirs (lots of ginseng), and watch a propaganda film about the Korean War, before driving back to the checkpoint. This time, the guards give me an admission pass and further instructions. I must "turn off my black box" (I've no doubt my car has one but, equally, no idea how to turn it off). I must not overtake military vehicles, or take any photographs

of military installations. I must drive without stopping to the DMZ viewpoint.

I enter an eerie zone now, with little other traffic and few buildings. There is still the odd farmer, though, working in fields hemmed in by great Slinky-rings of razor wire. I stop by the vast and lavish DMZ Museum. Cabinets display the pitiful possessions of North Koreans who attempted to reach freedom, while old magazine covers offer insight into a period of communist paranoia that I remember well from my own childhood in the 1970s. The cover of *World Week* has a tagline that reads “In the Grip of the Red Giant,” below which is a graphic showing two armored gloves reaching down from Communist China and grabbing the Korean Peninsula. Elsewhere, propaganda leaflets dropped by both North and South Korea over the years feature lots of skimpily clad young women. The message: “Life is better here” (for men, at least). There is also a powerful letter to American soldiers, airdropped by the Communists one Christmas during the war. It begins in a friendly fashion:

“We are wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We also have something to talk to you about.

“You are far away from those you love, in Korea, a country you never heard of three years ago ... You’ve been told you came here to stop ‘Communist aggression.’ But what do your own eyes and head tell you? The Koreans are fighting in their own country. The Chinese are defending their own nearby borders. Neither of these peoples have ever dreamed of invading the United States. It is the US troops who have come here with bombs, napalm, germs and every other weapon of mass murder.”

They had a point.

I wander on through a fascinating section dedicated to the wildlife that has flourished in the empty DMZ over the last sixty-five years, and one on the other overseas armed forces who fought for the South Koreans, including almost six thousand Brits. In the gift shop they are selling the produce of the local farmers I had driven past; this is a major buckwheat-growing region, so there are grains, flours, and noodles, incongruous beside the replica uniforms and medals.

The last few miles after the museum take me up to the DMZ itself. Here there is a viewing platform on a hill overlooking the no-man's-land stretch of coast, which, as Donald Trump pointed out, salivatingly, really is stunning real estate, ripe for condos and casinos. North of the border, it doesn't look to be populated. As I stand here high above the coast, together with a few South Koreans looking at the view through pay binoculars, I can hear distant, quavering propaganda drifting out of speakers from the North Korean side. It is an eerie, angry bark. I ask one of the other visitors what they are saying, but she giggles and runs away.

I wonder what the South Koreans think when they look at the North from their vantage point of wealth and democracy. Superiority? Wistful longing? Pity? The only sign of civilization in North Korea is a distant mountaintop lookout, but the South Koreans are currently building a snazzy new observation tower here. On reflection, probably not a good sign for the prospect of reunification.

I have something to confess at this point in my journey: this is the closest I will get to North Korea. On the one hand, it would have been good to go there and tick that box. On the other, as for all foreign visitors, my visit would have been very tightly controlled; I would not have been able to talk to anyone of interest and would not have learned anything new. For the bragging rights of a visit, a couple thousand pounds would also have had to have been dropped into the pockets of this frightful regime, so there is a moral argument against visiting North Korea. Whether it is the assassination of opponents overseas, the torture and imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of its own people in labor and reeducation camps, the public executions, the exporting of slave labor (to build stadiums for the World Cup in Qatar, for instance), or the systematic oppression and control of virtually every aspect of the lives of the entire population, down to their very thoughts, the regime in Pyongyang is at least thorough in its tyranny. But this was only part of my decision, and probably an excuse if I'm honest. I was visiting the region just prior to the recent détente between the United States, South Korea, and North Korea that took place in mid-2018, before President Moon had begun his remarkable campaign to woo Kim Jong-un. These days, everyone and Michael Palin has visited, but back then,

foremost in my mind was that I didn't want to have my brain turned to vegetable soup, as had happened to poor Otto Warmbier, the American college student arrested in January 2016 for stealing a propaganda poster from his hotel while on an arranged trip to Pyongyang. In 2017 Otto was delivered back to the Americans in a coma and died shortly after. America had banned its citizens from visiting the country as a result, and I unilaterally extended that ban to British citizens.

As I walk back down to the car, I pass a monument with a Declaration of Unification, drawn up in August 2010 by a volunteer association on the sixty-fifth anniversary of Korean Liberation Day. It traces the origins of the division of Korea, and asks:

“Is this what those who died for this country and declared independence in the March 1st [1919] movement wanted?... The truth is that even today, we are still pointing guns at people of our own race.”

★ ★ ★

There is no smooth way to transition from the bleak inhumanity of the DMZ to a park full of giant penises, but it was at the Penis Park, a couple of hours' drive back down south along the coast from the DMZ, that I finally fell in love with the Koreans.

The Penis Park lies up above the fishing harbor in the small town of Sinnam, roughly two-thirds of the way up the east coast of South Korea. Its real name is Haesindang Park, but what else do you call a rambling, wooded, cliff-top garden that is absolutely crammed with gigantic sculptures of the male member? All the pricks are proudly erect; some are several yards in length; most are alarmingly detailed, although testicles are an optional extra. A few of the statues eschew all anatomical verisimilitude and have faces; others have two or more heads; one of them appears to be ejaculating the Prince of Wales's feathers. Some are wooden, some are stone, one is bronze; the really big ones must surely be fiberglass.

What I enjoy about the park, though, is the atmosphere. All I can hear as I wander around are peals of laughter. This is mostly from the female visitors; the men feign bashfulness but laugh along too.

This is all a bit of a paradox because I had understood South Korean society to be quite puritanical, at least in terms of public exhibitions of anything overtly sexual like this. Pornography is banned. I didn't see any sex shops anywhere (not that I was looking, I should add). The sexual content of films is heavily censored. Even the cigarettes actors smoke are pixelated. Adultery was illegal in South Korea until 2015; people were *jailed* for being unfaithful, forty-two of them in 2008; and premarital sex is still the exception for the majority. Abortion has been punishable by up to a year in prison since 1953. And yet here we are, in a park full of penises.

South Korea shares this authoritarian squeamishness about sex with China. In 2016 the Chinese government even banned the “seductive eating of bananas” online. The Japanese, on the other hand, have quite a robust and open attitude toward sex and pornography, as evidenced by everything from the iconic *shunga* (woodblock-print erotica), most famously Hokusai's *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife* from 1814, which depicts a woman being ravaged by an octopus, to the open consumption of manga porn on public transport. You will find quite graphic discussions of sex on mainstream television too, although, weirdly, they pixelate the hairy bits in their porn (I'm told).

Sexual mores are changing in South Korea though, particularly among the young and the city-dwellers. Love hotels are as common here as in Japan, partly because so many young Koreans still live at home with their parents. In his excellent book *Korea: The Impossible Country*, Daniel Tudor describes the practice of “booking,” in which groups of men and women visit a nightclub and are introduced to each other by waiters in return for a tip—a kind of speed dating: “One-night stands from such meetings are very common ... Booking has an old fashioned Korean element to it—the introduction from the waiter—but the way in which it is now used suggests that young South Koreans today are sexually rather liberal.”

Many of the statues at the Penis Park have a totem-pole vibe, penis stacked on top of penis; there are penis wind chimes; and even the park's seats and benches are penis-shaped. But pride of place goes, naturally, given our proximity to the DMZ, to a military-themed ensemble featuring a three-

yard-long knob, mounted like a gigantic cannon between two wheels, with three “soldier” penises standing behind it, as if about to light its fuse.

Things get even weirder the higher you climb up the coastal cliffs. At one point, there is a semicircle of nine white stone penises, ranged around two oddly feminine, reclining penises. Each of the standing willies is two yards high and has creatures relating to the Chinese zodiac carved into it. There is a museum up here too, giving an actually quite serious ethnographical overview of penis art from around the world.

One display tells the story behind the park. Once upon a time, a fisherman’s girlfriend, a virgin, would sit on the rocks down below waiting for her beau to return from his trips out to sea, until, one day, a storm swept her to her death. After this tragic—but, really, let’s be honest, easily anticipated calamity—the villagers were unable to catch any more fish, no matter how hard they tried. That is, until one selfless local man ejaculated into the sea. This caused the fish to return, and so, to appease the fish gods or whatever, they built the Penis Park. An authentic South Korean cock-and-bull story, you might call it.

SEOUL VII

As I arrive at the piazza in front of the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul, Scorpions' "Rock You Like a Hurricane" begins to blare from speakers ranged around the entrance plaza.

Seoul's Military Police Motorcycle Display Team enter the square, gliding past the museum's outdoor collection of military vehicles, tanks, boats, and planes on their Harley-Davidsons, engines revving, blue lights flashing, and commence a complex routine of repeatedly crisscrossing the plaza, to a song whose lyrics are not obviously appropriate to the occasion ("The bitch is hungry, she needs to tell, So give her inches and feed her well").

Most museums would be a bit of an anticlimax after something like that, but this one is on a colossal scale and full of interesting stuff. It's thorough too, covering everything from the Imjin War and General Yi to the efforts of the Korean Independence Army during the Japanese occupation, and of course the Korean War of 1950–53. There is an onsite movie theater, which this week is showing *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. I suspect, though, that the South Koreans have a different approach to the memorializing of international conflict to the rest of the world, as the museum also has a wedding hall.

I spend some hours here viewing the events of the past century through Korean eyes. The bad guys are very clearly the Japanese, who again are accused of genocide. Apparently, in 1945 they were kicked out of Korea entirely due to the efforts of the Koreans themselves, which would come as news to the Americans. Blame for the current situation on the peninsula, meanwhile, is laid upon the Chinese for preventing the unification of the Korean Peninsula by intervening on the side of Kim Il-sung. Ominously, the final message from the museum is that the Korean War “should be remembered as an unfinished war.”

Aside from losing the credit for ending the war in Asia, the Americans come out of it all very well, but as I look out through the first-floor window at the Harley riders, now enjoying a post-prandial cup of coffee, I find myself playing the old blame game again. I begin, obviously, with the Japanese, without whose interference the twentieth century would have turned out very differently for Korea. Perhaps the peninsula would have modernized alone as a sovereign nation, or then again, maybe Russia would have taken it, or China even. In 1910, when Japan annexed Korea, thousands of Koreans fled to China, among them the parents of a young Kim Il-sung. In 1932 Kim joined the fight for Korean independence, by all accounts a determined campaign, during which the Japanese captured and killed his wife, Kim Hye-sun. Veteran Korea commentator Bruce Cumings believes that the fact that the Japanese used other Koreans to fight Kim and his fellow resistance is the prime reason for the poisoned blood on the peninsula today. It was the Japanese who set Korean against Korean in defense of their occupation, and that toxic legacy lingers today in many ways.

In the 1930s and '40s, the man in charge of the munitions factories supplying the Japanese counterinsurgency forces fighting Kim, and also responsible for the forced Korean labor program, was Kishi Nobusuke. After the war, Kishi was initially categorized as a Class A war criminal, but after being released from prison he later founded the Liberal Democratic Party and twice served as prime minister of Japan. Kishi is the grandfather of the current prime minister, Abe Shinzo, who is hoping to succeed where Kishi failed and revise the Japanese constitution to allow the country's Self-

Defense Forces to take offensive action. As Cumings noted in a recent article in the *London Review of Books*, the very evening in April 2017 that Abe was dining with President Trump at Mar-a-Lago in Florida, Kim Jong-un tested one of his missiles in the direction of Hokkaido—a “pointed message,” says Cumings. With the kind of symmetry that would be dismissed as fanciful were it to be found in fiction, wrote Cumings, “Kim Il-sung and Kishi are meeting again through their grandsons.”

The Americans also shoulder some of the responsibility for what happened to the Korean Peninsula after 1945—for the division in 1953, and for their subsequent support of successive military dictators who ruled South Korea for more than three decades. After the Second World War, rather than attempt a transparent justice and reconciliation process, the Americans used the Japanese-trained ruling class, including Park Chung-hee, to help administer South Korea. As Michael Breen put it to me, “The Americans ... they didn’t give a shit about the Japanese occupation. It was done. They actually found these people useful.” Many also point to the Americans’ decisions in postwar Tokyo as factors in Japan’s failure to atone for its war guilt and crimes, particularly in their protection of Emperor Hirohito.

And it was an American army colonel, Dean Rusk, who, the day after the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, famously drew the line roughly equating to the 38th parallel across the peninsula that divides North and South to this day. The Americans feared that tens of thousands of Korean resistance fighters, Kim Il-sung among them, would side with the Russians, and so moved 25,000 troops into Korea, proposing that the two World War II allies oversee a five-year transitional period leading to democratic elections run by the United Nations. The Russians opposed this, and in 1948 Rusk’s 38th parallel line, so casually drawn to demarcate the Russian and American occupation zones, took on a permanence no one had foreseen.

The accepted historical view is that, encouraged by the withdrawal of the American troops, at four a.m. on the morning of June 25, 1950, the North attacked the South, supported by Russian tanks. In response, the United Nations authorized military intervention, with the United States

contributing the majority of the UN forces. After initial setbacks, the forces stabilized the situation and pushed north. It was only when General MacArthur's troops reached the Yalu River on China's border that Mao Zedong felt compelled to join the fight on the side of the North Koreans, abandoning his pursuit of Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese nationalists, who had fled to Taiwan. Kim had sent a message by plane to Chairman Mao asking for help, playing the Chinese off against the Russians, as he would for many years. Within two weeks Chinese forces entered North Korea and would thereafter bear the brunt of the fight: 900,000 Chinese soldiers died or were injured, compared to 520,000 North Koreans.

A destructive stalemate raged for two and a half years. Over three million people died, and in the famous words of Rusk, the Americans bombed "everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another." The war ended with the armistice in 1953, but hostilities continued in various forms. The North attempted to kill the South's presidents on four occasions, and in 1974 succeeded in assassinating Yuk Young-soo, President Park's wife and the mother of Park Geun-hye, in the lobby of Seoul's National Theater. An era of extreme anti-communist paranoia lasted in the South up until the late 1980s. Imprisonment and torture awaited anyone even remotely suspected of being sympathetic to communism, or to the North.

And in 1976 World War III very nearly broke out at the Demilitarized Zone as a result of some light gardening. A group of US soldiers had been sent to trim an eighty-foot-high poplar tree that was obstructing the view of UN observers. The North Koreans, who claimed that the tree had been planted by Kim Il-sung himself and as such was sacred, took umbrage at this arboreal aggression and murdered two of the soldiers with their own axes. This resulted in a massive military operation involving twenty-three military vehicles, twenty-seven helicopters, nuclear capable bombers, F-4s, F-111s, an aircraft carrier, and a crack team of tree specialists (including the Zelig-like future president Moon Jae-in, doing his national service at the time) who managed to coppice the tree effectively at the second attempt, leaving a stump to remind the North Koreans of their resolve.

But the most famous North Korean attack was the Blue House Raid of January 1968, an audacious attempt by thirty-one North Korean soldiers to cut off the head of Park Chung-hee. They got within eight hundred yards of the presidential palace, and though most were killed or captured, one soldier is believed to have made it back to North Korea. Perhaps the lowest point in relations came in 1987, when Korean Air Flight 858 exploded in midair—the work of a North Korean agent, Kim Hyon-hui, who was subsequently captured by the South Koreans. She was the first to confirm the long-held urban myth that the North had been abducting Japanese citizens from their beaches and fishing boats.

I was curious to know what younger Koreans thought about the North and the events of seventy years ago. What was their relation to the North Koreans? According to one student I got chatting to in a café one day in Seoul, the answer was not a lot. “Nowadays, the younger people have almost no idea about the war,” he told me. I raised my eyebrows. “Really. It’s so far away from their real lives. There is almost no idea that we share an ethnicity [with North Koreans].”

One writer on Korea, Boyé Lafayette De Mente, claimed in his book *The Korean Mind* that the schism between North and South Korea existed long before the Japanese arrived: “The fact of the matter was that historically North and South Korea had been divided by ideological and social gaps often so wide that they behaved very much like separate countries.” A Southern elite had held sway over the North for centuries, and there had always been bad blood between the two.

All the South Koreans I spoke to, not just the young, seemed to accept the reality of a nuclear-armed neighbor, rather like people who live on seismic fault lines come to accept the risk of an earthquake. “People are immune to it as a coping mechanism,” as one local put it to me.

How has that numbness affected attitudes toward reunification? The 2018 détente—when Kim Jong-un stepped across the threshold at the DMZ and shook hands with Moon Jae-in—had reunification, in one form or another, as its unspoken subtext, the idea that one day the North and the South will reunite under one government. But what would that actually look like? Michael Breen had this frank assessment, should the North and South

ever join together again: “Day One will be all fireworks and live coverage on CNN. Day Two, the poor North Koreans go to the bottom of the hierarchical ladder.” In his book, *The New Koreans*, he quotes an assistant South Korean foreign minister of his acquaintance who, strictly off the record, made this unequivocal statement regarding Korean reunification: “He leaned forward over our coffee cups and spoke in slow, clear syllables. ‘We ... Do ... Not ... Want ... To ... Unify ... With ... North ... Korea.’ On the record, the same official offered this: ‘We Koreans are a divided people and our goal is to become one again.’”

People do *care* about reunification, of course, but they are just not that motivated about making it happen. The feeling I had was that most South Koreans see the North more as a problem to be postponed indefinitely rather than a lost half of the family with whom they hope one day to reunite (literally in the case of many Koreans). They don’t really see reunification as an opportunity, even though there are obvious advantages to be had for a country with a population of eighty million, not least the economies of scale and cheap labor. A unified Korea would also be a key overland link between China, Russia, and Japan. “A lot of people say that they want reunification but they don’t have a clear blueprint,” said the journalist Stephanie Sehoi Park. “Plus, they don’t want it to happen in their lifetime. I mean, reunification sounds harmonious and beautiful, but it is going to be so much turmoil, and my generation doesn’t want to pay the price for it.” How about you let China have it? I asked. “Nooo! I want the land. They have a lot of natural resources. We need the space.”

The mechanism and time scale for reunification is unclear. “If it happens rapidly, that is disastrous for South Korea,” said Park Sangin, the economics professor from Seoul University. He believes that the South Korean economy would not be able to support the North in the short term; that the differences in the mentality and skills of the two peoples would present huge technical and social problems. “We have to narrow that gap to reach unification. It is much, much worse than the gap between East and West Germany. North Korea is much more isolated than East Germany was, so it is not just an economic gap; it is also the exchange between people.”

Perhaps the main reason reunification seems unlikely is that many powerful forces would have much to lose. The military-industrial complex would suffer enormously, particularly in America—something that was evident in the dramatic drop in share prices of Lockheed Martin when President Moon met Kim Jong-un in April 2018. Japan doesn't want it to happen either, because it would make Korea more of an economic and potentially military threat. China would probably prefer the peninsula to remain divided too, all the better to threaten Seoul, hold Pyongyang to account, and keep America and Japan at bay. And America/the West values South Korea as an ally in the region.

Perhaps the most telling statistic I saw regarding the ambivalence of the South Koreans themselves toward reunification was the live internet search ranking when the two countries' leaders commenced those face-to-face talks. The talks ranked tenth, after searches for various actors' and actresses' names, boy bands, the next day's weather, and college acceptance rates. These were the things South Koreans were searching for online.

INCHEON

My time in South Korea ends in Incheon, an hour or so west of central Seoul. I have elected to continue my “slow travel” approach and take the ferry, which leaves Incheon every evening and arrives in Qingdao, on China’s west coast, eighteen hours later.

First, though, I have a spare day in Incheon and have heard that, like Yokohama, it has a large Chinese population, having been the main port of entry from Chinese migrants from Shandong Province for over a century. A small Chinatown has somehow survived here, despite Incheon also being the landing place of the United Nations forces in 1950; it is close to the harbor and has a cluster of museums and restaurants. On a dreary, dark Monday evening, with the air cloaked in greige smog and smelling vaguely of drains, Incheon’s Chinatown is a rather desolate place, for all the gaiety of the four-story Chinese restaurants lit up like fairground rides.

In one, I order a bowl of *jjajangmyeon*. These are the classic noodles of Incheon’s Chinatown, commemorated with their own museum, where I learn that they were brought here by Chinese laborers in the 1880s. Back then, this was cheap, quick, filling workers’ food sold from handcarts down on the harborside. Over time it has acquired a Korean touch of fermented soybean paste and, in the 1950s, for some reason, caramel, and is served

with the usual generous array of Korean side dishes—pickles, fermented dipping sauces, and kimchi.

In the 1880s, when Korea opened up to foreign trade, the Japanese concession was located right next to the Qing Chinese area down here by the port. The two were divided by a stairway, which is still here, these days crowned by a more recent statue of Confucius donated by the city of Qingdao. Incheon has managed to hold on to the largest collection of pre-colonial era Japanese buildings in the country. I take a wander around this motley congregation of mostly former banks. A stout granite building dating from 1883 with a neoclassical dome was once the Incheon branch of the First Bank of Japan, the first modern financial institution in Korea. “Japanese Street” has a few more Japanese-style buildings, including some wooden shops, reminiscent of the *machiya* (townhouses) you find in Kyoto. The old British consulate is still here too, now repurposed as the Paradise Hotel.

The next day, heavily dosed with my usual cocktail of seasickness medications, I arrive at the port. There is a long queue ahead of me in the crowded departure lounge, but the mood among my fellow passengers—middle-aged salesmen and truck drivers—is festive and friendly, and as we are called to climb the gangplank, there is that nervous excitement in the air common to all embarking ferry passengers.

On board, the purser shows me to my windowless cabin. There are two beds on either side of the narrow room. By the door is a tiny toilet and shower room, and at the end of the room, a table and bench. The cabin is half-filled with cardboard boxes and a tatty black suitcase bulging at the seams and tied with rope, presumably belonging to my cabinmate.

This ferry, like all ferries ever, as far as I can make out, was cobbled together from vinyl, polyester, and Dralon sometime around 1974. Every surface is coated with a layer of grime. There is the smell of something decaying about the place; you would not want to walk on the carpet in bare feet—a hazmat suit would be preferable.

I leave my bags and go exploring. The Carpenters are playing over the intercom and I begin to wonder whether I have bought a ticket to some kind of seventies-themed cruise by mistake. There is a convenience store,

stocked with instant noodles and cans of Chupa Chups strawberry soda. On one deck I stumble upon a vast, open dormitory with rows of mattresses laid out on the floor—an option if my roomie turns out to be a snorer. I inspect the restaurant buffet, which offers rice with a range of catering pans filled with semiliquid red matter. Later I will try some of the red stuff and it will be so spicy that it removes an entire layer of the lining of my mouth.

The ferry departs a drizzly Incheon on time, inching beneath the mammoth, Samsung-built suspension bridge to the airport. I go up top, stand beside a funnel belching thick black smoke like an old minicab, and tilt my head back to look up at the bridge's underside. It is properly awesome, and I can't help but wonder if I should be up there, in a taxi instead, on the way to the airport.

The sea, though, is calm, for which I am grateful. As I lie on my bed, I am jiggled gently back and forth, but during the night I will be intermittently disturbed by my roommate's operatic teeth-grinding and weird straining noises. He was there when I returned from my rooftop sojourn. His name is Dong, and he is from Beijing. Via a complicated mime routine, he explained that he tiles bathrooms, or raises camels, or runs a mime workshop. It could have been any of those. I was left none the wiser about what was in the boxes, but assumed he had been conducting business in South Korea. What about THAAD? I asked. I mimed rockets being shot down. His eyes followed my finger, indicating a rocket's trajectory, up to the ceiling, then glanced anxiously toward the door. By this point he now either believed that I work in the aerospace industry, or am a terrorist. I do "typing" instead. Now he thinks I am a pianist.

We then performed an awkward dance around who went to the bathroom first to prepare for bed, but, eventually, turned off the lights. I cannot sleep, though. How could I? I am in a box on the sea in my underwear with a strange man who thinks I am a piano-playing terrorist. At around three a.m., it dawns on me: *I am on a slow boat to China*. I don't know if it's the medication, but the phrase seems fascinating, and I roll it around my head for hours. Then, at around five a.m., we hit a rough patch of water and the cabin begins to swirl. I feel as if I am in a barrel going over Niagara Falls. I fight the urge to reflect upon my earlier meal of gristly beef

tendon in spicy ketchup, but some masochistic imperative keeps bringing it to mind. I hasten for the toilet, where we shall draw a veil over the rest of the night's events. But yes, there were times when I wanted to die.

As I wait to disembark in Qingdao the next morning, the purser corrals me into a special priority departure zone. The rest of the passengers, including Dong, to whom I have bidden an appropriately awkward goodbye, queue up in front of me in the cabin corridor.

While waiting, I witness my first example of Blatant Queue-Jumping Syndrome (BQJS). Two shabbily dressed Chinese men, one in mirrored sunglasses, the other with a heroic comb-over, arrive late, carrying cardboard boxes tied with string, but instead of going to the back of the line, they simply station themselves at the head of the queue in front of a woman who has been standing there for about ten minutes. The men gaze up innocently at the ceiling. The woman frowns, but takes no further action.

As the weeks pass, I will witness this kind of shameless line-cutting quite often in China. It is a cliché for foreigners, particularly English people, I understand, to complain about this, so instead, I merely offer you my empirical survey of the different strategies employed. Two demographics are particularly prone to attempt the BQJS, and each has its specific methods. Middle-aged men exude an air of relaxed entitlement, as if sidling to the front of queues is their birthright. Younger women, meanwhile, pretend to be engrossed in a Very Important Conversation on their smartphones, looking upward at the departures board in a “don't-talk-to-me-I'm-multitasking” kind of a way and using the arm holding the device to shield themselves from the interference of their victims. Both of these techniques were impressive in their brazenness. I could never pull them off. But not once did I see anyone make any kind of protest, much less take action; everyone seemed to just accept that there was always someone who, while you were in the middle of a transaction, would edge up to the window and thrust a piece of paper or some money beneath the glass to distract the teller. And the teller would always turn away to deal with the intruder as if it were a perfectly acceptable thing to do.

During my travels in China I spent many hours quietly brooding to myself about the BQJ-ers. I developed extraordinary peripheral vision,

much broader than humans are normally capable of, so that I could block attempts to usurp me by taking a swift step left or right, or sometimes jockeying both ways. Queuing for a ticket to a museum in Shanghai one time, I engaged in a particularly satisfying bout of this with a diminutive yet determined elderly woman intent on muscling in on my teller time. I shimmied left, I shimmied right, blocking her access to the ticket clerk like Beyoncé's bouncer shielding his charge from the paparazzi. In the end, she twiggged, and we both laughed about it, but much later, fatigued from weeks of battle, I finally broke down one afternoon while waiting to check in for a flight at Shanghai Airport. A middle-aged man had outflanked the roped-off line, swooping in at an acute angle like a bird of prey on an unsuspecting vole, to the next available check-in counter as soon as the previous customer vacated it. I was fifth in the queue but decided to mount a protest. I shouted to the pathetic individual at the head of the queue who had allowed this to happen.

"What? Why have you let him do that? He just walked in from over there! We are all waiting here!" I gesticulated wildly.

The man at the head of the queue looked at me, offered the very slightest of shrugs, and returned his gaze to the counter. I was powerless; I could do nothing but fantasize violent acts. When it finally came to my turn, the check-in clerk informed me that my luggage was overweight. I would have to go to another desk to pay some money. She pointed over to the left, from where the queue-jumper had materialized.

"Wait, but then I will have to queue all over again," I bleated, pointing at the line behind me, which had now grown even longer.

"No, it's okay. You can just come up to the counter," said the woman, mildly.

I realized then that this is what the "queue jumper" had been doing. He hadn't been queue jumping at all. After that, I never got worked up about Chinese queues again.

As I am waiting to disembark from the ferry in Qingdao, a man sits beside me in the VIP area. He is dressed like a Sunday-afternoon explorer in khaki trousers with zippers around the knees and a fly-fishing jacket. He has a large rucksack from which dangle a water bottle and binoculars.

“Look at them,” the man says to me in disgust. “Chinese.”

“Oh, you’re not Chinese. Korean?”

The man looks affronted. “Nooo, Japanese!”

He introduces himself. He is a travel writer. Did I know this ferry was built in Japan? he asks. His body language implies that it is clearly beyond the Koreans to build a ferry of this quality. “You know,” he says, leaning in conspiratorially, “Korean ferries sink all the time.” The travel writer has views about the Chinese too. The Chinese are unpredictable, he says, and not to be trusted. Being Japanese, he has to be careful, particularly when traveling in rural areas. There are parts of China where the Japanese are still disliked, and though he has never experienced physical violence, he sometimes pretends to be Taiwanese to be safe.

I leave my new acquaintance to his opinions and get a cab to the train station. Qingdao looks to be an attractive, leafy city with some appealingly shabby colonial-era buildings. Back at the beginning of China’s so-called Century of Shame, when Western colonial powers were having their wicked way with the Middle Kingdom, Qingdao was the German concession city. As well as some examples of Mitteleuropa architecture, the German legacy lingers in the local fast-food joints, which offer sausage burgers, and Tsingtao, which is still one of the biggest beer brands in China.

Qingdao Station is an impressive affair, huge, well-ordered, clean. As my journey continues, the stations will grow in grandeur until Shanghai, the main concourse of which is perhaps the largest building I have ever been inside. There is something Swiftian about traveling in modern China. This is one of those lands where everything is out of scale, or off kilter, and never more so than in the railway stations.

As with all stations, including the subways, there is a long X-ray security line to enter Qingdao Station. Why does China need this kind of security when London and Madrid, both of which have experienced bomb attacks on their subway systems, do without? Some people I asked about this explained that it was because of an attack a few years ago at Kunming Station in Yunnan by knife-wielding Uighurs, the oppressed Muslim Turkic people from Xinjiang. Others talked vaguely about wanting to preempt the kinds of terrorism seen in Europe. Someone said it was crowd control; there

were times when so many people wanted to get trains that they needed to be slowed and filtered to prevent crushing. Or were they a Keynesian employment strategy to generate jobs, like the groups of glow-stick-waving health-and-safety gnomes who hover around the edges of building sites in Japan? One can't help but suspect the bottomless paranoia of the Chinese authorities has something to do with it too; that, and the classic phantom-threat strategy often employed by totalitarian regimes: "See how dangerous the world is? But we will protect you."

Inside the station I watch a large LCD screen on which a lavish propaganda film plays on a loop. Entitled *Amazing China*, the film highlights new transport infrastructure projects, part of President Xi Jinping's much vaunted Belt and Road, a Silk Route for the twenty-first century through sixty-eight countries; along with aircraft carriers and satellites, radar stations, and high-speed trains like the one I am about to take to Beijing. All this is interspersed with a strong subtext promoting regional unity—images of children in traditional dress, fluttering Chinese flags, and so on. This is followed by an equally expensive film promoting a brand of thermos.

The train I take to Beijing is punctual to the minute, spacious, and modern, and according to the display over the carriage entrance, at times reaches over 200 miles per hour. We travel through scenery smothered in a smudgy brown gauze of pollution. Rural China is a compelling mix of heavy industry, smoking chimneys, high-rise apartments, smaller lower-rise settlements with boxy terraces, and industrial-scale farmland. Evidently this is where some of the food comes from to feed 1.37 billion people. At one point in my journey, for at least forty minutes I look out upon an endless vista of polytunnels. Considering the speed at which we are traveling, we have probably just passed through a region the size of Belgium.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

HARBIN I

Ishii Shiro was born at the end of the nineteenth century in Shibayama, east of Tokyo, close to modern-day Narita Airport. Photographs of Ishii in his late twenties show a bespectacled figure with a jutting jaw and an oversize overcoat who looks barely in his teens. In 1920 he had graduated from the Department of Medicine at Kyoto Imperial University. A dedicated, serious, and clearly ambitious young man, Ishii would go on to marry the daughter of the university president.

Ishii had a special interest in bacteria, and in 1928 he visited Europe to research historic plagues. Four years later, he patented a revolutionary device to purify water that would become known as the Ishii purifier; he also helped to establish a bacterial research laboratory at the Army Medical School in Tokyo.

This was a turbulent time in the Japanese capital. Against a backdrop of severe economic depression, a militarist elite was working, sometimes violently with mutiny and assassinations, to undermine the cabinet, suppress democracy, and enhance the power of the emperor. The militarists were much encouraged by the success of the Japanese Kwantung Army, which in 1931 had taken it upon itself to invade Manchuria in northeastern China, using the pretext of a staged sabotage of one of their own railway lines (this is known as the Mukden- or Manchurian Incident). In February

1932, having gone fully rogue, the Kwantung Army then attacked Harbin, one of the largest cities in the region, and installed the “last emperor” of Qing China, Pu-yi, as puppet ruler of “Manchukuo,” the name the army gave to the newly conquered territories of northern China and Inner Mongolia. The invasion was condemned by the Western world; America, which had major economic interests in China, imposed trade sanctions. In response, Japan quit the League of Nations and became gripped by a kind of war fever, its sense of invincibility fueled by snowballing military successes and the retrospective approval of all this by its “divine” emperor. Popular support propelled the Imperial Army onward to the walls of Beijing, after which, in 1936, Japan entered a pact with Germany and Italy and expanded farther into China.

In the midst of all this, in 1933 Ishii’s bacterial lab was transferred to Harbin, where it was renamed the Kwantung Army Epidemic Prevention Squad. That was merely a cover for an institution that is now better known by its code name, Unit 731, where the young microbiologist oversaw the world’s largest research center dedicated to creating deadly bacterial weapons. This work involved fifty different bacteria and germs, including plague, cholera, anthrax, and tuberculosis, developed using systemized human experimentation and live vivisection.

Unit 731 began in a small basement in the center of Harbin with experiments on two groups of so-called bandits—the first were subjected to a five-minute phosgene poisonous gas experiment; the second were injected with 15 milliliters of potassium cyanate, then given 20,000-volt shocks, which burned them alive. In 1939, after some prisoners escaped, the center was moved to a more secure base in the suburb of Pingfang. The new complex was purpose-built, with a high-voltage fence and three-yard protective ditch surrounding it. Within its grounds, Ishii would go on to oversee the development of aggressive biological agents; conduct experiments into the effects of bioweapons through testing on humans, animals, and plants; and work on epidemic prevention and water purification for the military. Up to 3,500 staff and prisoners were housed on the site, which later gained its own airstrip.

Ishii's prisoners—Chinese, Russian, and Korean—were well-fed and encouraged to exercise in order to keep them fit for the experiments, which included exposure to temperatures of -16 degrees Fahrenheit to determine the effect of frostbite on Japanese troops fighting in Mongolia. Victims would be laid on their backs, tied to stretchers; some would have bare hands and wear wet socks, others wet gloves and undersized boots; or they would be drunk, or have empty stomachs. Others were exposed to airborne infection and poisonous gas, or infected by explosive devices, or given deadly injections. Often the prisoners would be subject to vivisection without anesthetic; medical gauze was stuffed into their mouths to muffle their screams. In all, more than six hundred people are believed to have died there each year of its operation.

The victims were criminals, suspected resistance fighters, spies, or often just local Chinese whom the Japanese military police didn't like the look of, deemed "irredeemable recidivists." Once prisoners had been designated for Special Transfer to Unit 731, they were dehumanized in the manner of German concentration camp inmates and referred to as *maruta*, meaning "logs."

With Japan's supplies of metals and minerals severely restricted by American embargoes, germ warfare came to be seen as a more sustainable method of killing people than bombs and bullets, and Unit 731 took on a more urgent role in the war effort. According to some calculations, the facility propagated quantities of deadly bacteria sufficient to wipe out the entire population of the earth.

Germ warfare was used on the battlefield for the first time by the Japanese in July 1939, when a suicide squad from Unit 731 dropped 22.5 kilograms of liquid cholera, typhoid, and other bacteria into the Khalkha River in the border regions of China and Mongolia, where the Japanese were fighting the Russians. As the war continued, several more bacteria warfare research centers were set up by Ishii in China: in Nanjing, Changchun, Guangzhou, and Beijing, as well as in Singapore and elsewhere in the rapidly expanding Japanese empire.

In all, Chinese historians claim that the Japanese used biological weapons 1,919 times in twenty provinces in China.

A few days after arriving in Beijing, I take a train up to Harbin, eight hours north. A couple more hours from here, and I would reach the Siberian and North Korean borders. I am going to visit the Japanese Germ Warfare Experimental Base Museum, built ten years ago on the site of Unit 731. I take a taxi to the museum, an hour from the city center, out in a semi-industrial zone, just across the road from a massive Ford factory.

The main building of the museum is housed in a sleek black granite monolith. It could be a Scandinavian art museum but for a plaque that reads that it stands as “a memorial against Fascism alongside the concentration camps of Europe and the zero ground of Hiroshima, reminding the whole world of the need to unite in keeping peace and opposing war.”

Some Japanese still deny the true purpose of Unit 731, but I found the museum convincing, not so much because of the wealth of material evidence it presents, but more because of its scarcity. There are some microscopes, fumigators, scalpels, gas masks, the unthinkable “viscera racks” and “tooth hooks”—most of which have been handed in by locals over the years—but not much more in terms of physical evidence. And the museum could easily have become an exercise in emotive, anti-Japanese propaganda, but instead it presents its grisly facts in a relatively straightforward manner using eyewitness testimony, much of it from Japanese veterans, Japanese academics, and journalists.

I take a walk through the grounds, mostly excavated foundations covered in open-sided sheds, like Roman ruins often are in Europe. Signs mark the former purpose of each building in the complex, which was built according to German plans. In the so-called Square Building, large-scale experiments with bubonic plague, anthrax, cholera, tuberculosis, and typhoid were conducted on healthy, living captives. Near the site of the Freezing Lab, a two-story building that was hermetically sealed to enable experiments to be carried out year-round, I see another small sign for the Ground Squirrel Breeding Room. The Japanese also bred mice, rabbits, donkeys, monkeys, and horses for experimentation. One newly arrived junior member of Unit 731, a keen horse-rider, later recalled his first encounter with the horses: “I didn’t see the supervisors, therefore I mounted the nearest tethered horse. I said ‘Go, go.’ ‘What are you doing!’ an angry

voice came suddenly. Two researchers wearing protective clothing were greatly frightened and ran toward me.” The young man was stripped and sterilized from head to foot. The horse, he later discovered, had been deliberately infected with glanders bacteria, an infectious disease of horses and cattle that was thought to be of possible use against humans. Unit 731 also explored various delivery methods for their weapons, including bombs, and spraying from aircraft; their most outlandish plan was to send germ warfare balloon bombs across the Pacific to the US mainland.

Ishii was one of four brothers. An elder brother died in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, and Ishii would later arrange for the two others to come and work with him in Harbin—one in the crematorium, the other as a veterinary technician, looking after the experimental animals. Many others who worked at Unit 731 were also blood relations, or people from his hometown, classmates, or former students, all the better to maintain secrecy.

On August 9, 1945, Unit 731 learned that the Red Army was heading its way. Ishii ordered his staff to destroy all evidence of their work in the furnace room. His brother was given responsibility for killing the remaining prisoners with poison gas or by shooting, and cremating the corpses. The Japanese bombed the complex on August 10 to get rid of the buildings, but infected mice and fleas escaped, and plague broke out in Pingfang. In all, 143 people would die of plague in Harbin over the next nine years.

By the time Japan surrendered, most of those who had worked at Unit 731 had fled to Japan via Busan. They had strict orders never to contact one another, identify one another, or continue the work of the unit in any way. Some were captured by the Russians, including Kawashima Kiyoshi, head of Division 1, who at his trial in 1945 testified that there had been over three thousand deaths at Unit 731 between 1940 and 1945 alone. Several other Unit 731 veterans who made it back to Japan ignored their orders and formed veteran’s associations. None were ever punished for their activities. Indeed, as the museum in Harbin puts it, many “reaped exorbitant profits by opening private hospitals and pharmaceutical companies ... [and] occupied important positions in Japanese medical circles....” One commander, Kitano Masaji, worked in a private medical clinic in Japan and lived until

1986. The man in charge of frostbite research, Yoshimura Hisato, went to work in a medical college. The former head of the anthrax section, Uemura Hazime, joined the Japanese Ministry of Education. One veteran became vice governor of Hokkaido, another the president of the Health School of Japan's Self-Defense Forces.

In the 1980s and '90s many Unit 731 veterans offered detailed witness statements describing the atrocities they had committed. Some defended their actions as a necessity of war. Others, like Shinozuka Yoshio, who went to work in Unit 731 at just fifteen years old, confessed as a form of atonement and appeared as witnesses in Japanese courts to the army's crimes on behalf of Chinese survivors and their families. Japanese journalists and academics have also thoroughly researched the history of Unit 731, perhaps to a greater extent than their Chinese peers, and as with the Korean comfort women, Japanese lawyers have assisted the relatives of victims in bringing civil suits against the Japanese authorities. Yet still, there are Japanese academics responsible for some school history textbooks who deny that human experimentation took place in Harbin. In *Unit 731*, a 2002 BBC Correspondent documentary, journalist Anita McNaught brought along a suitcase full of evidence—she could barely carry it up the steps to his office—to present to one textbook author, Fujioka Nobukatsu, a professor of education at Takushoku University. Initially, he said there was no evidence. Presented with the contents of the suitcase, he claimed the information was falsified.

There is plenty of criticism of Japanese deniers of Unit 731's history at the museum in Harbin, which talks of “the right wing forces' distortion of Japan's history of aggression, gilding of its invasion against, and occupation of, other countries with a veneer of respectability, and the revival of the unhealthy tradition of militarism.” It also displays a photograph taken in 2013 of Abe Shinzo at the Japanese defense force base in Higashimatsushima, Miyagi Prefecture. Abe is sitting inside the cockpit of a T-4 training jet plane, smiling and giving a thumbs-up. On the side of the plane is the number 731. The caption reads: “It is inconceivable that Abe Shinzo could not be fully aware of the history of Unit 731. His action

reflects the fact that mainstream Japanese society refuses to admit to, reflect on, or apologize for its war responsibilities.”

Ishii fled to Japan on August 12, 1945. He faked his own death and a funeral was held for him in his hometown on November 10. American investigators eventually tracked him down to Kanazawa, where he was hiding in a shrine that was functioning as a kind of ad hoc focal point for Unit 731. The Americans had their own biological warfare experimental center in Fort Detrick, Maryland, where they had, of course, been forbidden from experimenting on humans, and so were keen to get hold of Ishii’s results. “Such information could not be obtained in our own laboratories because of scruples attached to human experimentation,” read a report by US investigators.

Ishii was interrogated at length, initially downplaying the role of germ warfare in general: “In a winning war, there is no necessity for using BW [biological weapons] and in a losing war, there is not the opportunity to use BW effectively. You need a lot of men, money, and materials to conduct research into BW,” he said. He admitted to testing on “small animals” but denied planning and carrying out biological warfare. But as he came to understand that his testimony would not be used or even referred to at the Tokyo Trial, Ishii began to open up and eventually offered all his research to the United States in return for all charges against him and his team being dropped. (Recent revelations suggest the Americans later deployed plague-infected fleas in the war with North Korea, using Japanese techniques.) He always denied that the work of Unit 731 was officially sanctioned by Tokyo, and claimed until his death that the emperor had no knowledge of their research, telling one interrogator, “The emperor is a lover of humanity and never would have consented to such a thing.” In fact, Hirohito gave the order to deploy the biological weapons in a directive bearing his name in July 1937. He was fully aware, and fully approved, of Unit 731. Ishii died of laryngeal cancer on October 9, 1959, at home in Tokyo, aged sixty-seven.

How is all this viewed in China today? At the museum, I read the results of a survey carried out by UNESCO as part of the museum’s application for World Heritage Site status. Surprisingly, the majority of locals in Harbin did

not even know about Unit 731, or the museum. Some 76 percent believed that not all the people of Japan should be lumped together as right-wingers, while 55 percent felt that the world should not condemn present-day Japanese.

As I am leaving, I talk briefly with the clerk at the information counter. She says the museum receives three hundred thousand visitors a year. I ask if many are Japanese. Not so many, she says. Perhaps a couple a week, mostly students. However, it does seem that the facts surrounding Unit 731 are finally achieving mainstream acceptability in Japan. In August 2017 the Japanese national broadcaster NHK screened a documentary about Unit 731 featuring the testimony of former staff members, and in April 2018 a list of 3,607 of the unit's personnel, dating from January 1945, was published by a Japanese academic at Shiga University.

As I rode in the taxi back to my hotel in the center of Harbin, I thought about the right-wingers in Japan who claim those who have gone on the record about their time working in Unit 731 have been brainwashed by the Chinese. Perhaps they genuinely believed it all to be a hoax, or perhaps they were convinced that any actions, no matter how morally repugnant today, were justified during a time of conflict. I suspect that at least some of their resistance comes from a concern about encouraging the "Japan bashers," particularly those Chinese and Korean politicians who use attacks on Japan to boost their popularity. But if the Japanese think these issues are going to fade away quietly, they are mistaken. Both the Chinese and the Koreans are determined to memorialize Japanese crimes, and, as I would find out, their efforts show no signs of diminishing.

HARBIN II

On the morning of October 26, 1909, just before Japan annexed Korea, Itō Hirobumi, the former prime minister of Japan and close friend of the Meiji emperor, arrived at Harbin Station, at that time a Russian enclave within Chinese territory. Itō had been negotiating on the train with the Russian financial minister, Vladimir Kokovtsov, in the wake of the defeat of Russia in the 1905 war and Japan's growing presence in Korea, now effectively its protectorate.

Waiting for Itō at the station was a Korean resistance fighter, Ahn Jung-geun, with a gun hidden in his lunch box. As Itō descended the steps from the train and began to walk along the platform, Ahn emerged from the shadows and fired several shots, killing him. The Russians arrested Ahn but quickly handed him over to the Japanese, who tried and executed him. As with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand a few years later, the killing of Itō had major repercussions throughout East Asia, although it is viewed very differently today by the Koreans and Japanese: the former revere Ahn as a hero, the latter consider him a terrorist.

In Seoul a week earlier, I had visited a beautiful contemporary museum dedicated to Ahn. Understandably, today South Korea takes the veneration of those who fought for independence against the Japanese very seriously, to the extent, some say, of exaggerating the scale and achievements of the

resistance. In the annual presidential Liberation Day speech in 2018, Moon Jae-in claimed, for instance, that “The struggles of the Korean people for independence were more relentless than those in any country around the world. National liberation was not given simply from the outside.” I wonder whether the French, whose resistance of the Germans was pretty significant, or the Americans, who liberated Korea, would agree?

The four glass cubes that house the Ahn museum could not be more prestigiously located, up in Namsan Park, on the hill that dominates central Seoul. Inside, the museum explains the context for Japan’s annexation of Korea following what it called the thirty years of “national crisis” that had started with the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876—following Japan’s own gunboat diplomacy approach to Korea—through to the full annexation of Korea in 1910.

Ahn Jung-geun was born in the midst of all this in 1879. As a young man, he converted to Catholicism and later traveled to Shanghai in an attempt to meet with the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in exile there. Ahn returned to Korea when his father died in 1906 and, according to the museum, vowed not to touch a drop of alcohol until Korea achieved independence. Not content with the teetotalism, Ahn’s patriotic group also cut off the first joint of their ring fingers as part of an oath to restore the independence of Korea. One exhibit in the museum re-created the aftermath of this voluntary maiming with a bloodied, severed fingertip resting, spotlighted, upon a folded handkerchief. In 1908 Ahn left for Siberia, aiming to raise an army to attack the Japanese. He hatched his plan to assassinate Itō while visiting Harbin. The Ahn museum in Seoul has a full-size tableau re-creating the moment he fired the fatal shot. Photographs showed him after his arrest, a handsome young man with a broad, open face, high forehead, wispy mustache, and chains around his waist. He claimed to be a lieutenant general in the Korean Righteous Army, and therefore a prisoner of war. “I did not kill for vengeance,” Ahn wrote in his statement to the Japanese. “I killed for the peace of east Asia.” Ahn’s English lawyer, J. C. E. Douglas, the son of Admiral Archibald Douglas, was dispatched from Shanghai, but despite massive international attention on the case—*The Times* of London reported, “Japan’s modern civilization

was as much on trial as any of the prisoners”—a death sentence was passed and Ahn was executed on March 26, 1910.

Four years after the Ahn museum opened in Seoul, then South Korean president Park Geun-hye persuaded the Chinese to open a memorial museum to Ahn within Harbin Station itself. Park knew that any kind of antagonism toward Japan always played well among her South Korean electorate and the Chinese authorities perhaps also realized that they could make political capital out of the friction Ahn still generates between Japan and South Korea. At the museum's opening, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Qin Gang, said: "If Ahn Jung-geun were a terrorist [as some Japanese claim], what about the fourteen Class-A war criminals of World War II honored in the Yasukuni Shrine?"

I thought I would try to see this new Ahn museum in Harbin Station while I was in the city, and so head off there the next morning from my hotel.

Harbin is home to about ten million people, and has developed so quickly, there seems to have been no time for the niceties of suburbs or commuter belts, or planning, there are just forests of beige tower blocks, their facades already crumbling, then arable land, then industrial zone, each evolving seemingly at random. The exception is Zhongyang Dajie, the rather lovely tree-lined main shopping street, where you can still sense some of the city's Russian-Jewish past as you walk beneath the Chinese flags.

In the late nineteenth century, the Russians had persuaded the Chinese to allow them to use Harbin as the administrative center for the Trans-Siberian Railway, connecting Russia to the year-round warm waters of Port Arthur (near present-day Dalian, on the western side of the Korean Peninsula). The Czarist leadership in Moscow encouraged thousands of Jews to move to what was little more than a village on the banks of the river, promising them relief from the periodic pogroms that erupted in European Russia. After the 1917 revolution, the Jewish community in Harbin became the driving force of the city's economy and business, as well as for its flourishing cultural life, but conditions for them deteriorated with

the arrival of the Japanese forces in 1931, and most of Harbin's Jewish community eventually left for Australia and Palestine.

A reputation as a center for classical music is one legacy of Harbin's Jewish heritage; a ragbag of Baroque, Renaissance, and Art Nouveau buildings also survives. Some have been restored and bear plaques explaining their history, written in a rather Borat-esque style (one referred to its building having been owned by "a Jew named P. A. Birkwiky," for instance; another had a plaque explaining it once housed "the National Bank of Jews"). Other Russian remnants include onion-domed Orthodox churches and wedding-cakey early-twentieth-century banks and department stores, one of which houses the tourist information office. I go in to try to find out more about the city's history and current attractions, but the staff seem genuinely alarmed that an actual tourist is asking them questions, so I leave before causing them any further distress.

Back on the cobbled Zhongyang Dajie, all the familiar European luxury brands are present and correct and many shops also sell Russian blueberries, vodka, furs, and dolls. That piece of music, the one that always seems to accompany cossack dancing, blares from many of the buildings; at a square halfway down the street, couples are ballroom dancing, and farther down a Russian orchestra is playing to a small audience. There is also an unexpectedly prominent Japanese presence on the streets—there are sushi and *takoyaki* restaurants, a clothing brand called Harajuku, and Japanese fast-food chains like Yoshinoya—but on only one of Harbin's historic buildings do I find reference to the Japanese era. Perhaps tellingly, the building is a semi-derelict, stumpy little tower. Its plaque is badly cracked and covered with paint drips and merely notes that the tower was "built and used by Japanese in the 1930s."

Finally, I arrive at the south side of Harbin Station, but I am stranded, separated from it by many, many lanes of fast-moving traffic. I try for several minutes to cross, but the risk of death is significant. A man with two squirrels on leashes walks by and I am momentarily distracted. I resort to trying to hail a taxi just to cross the road, but none will stop.¹ Eventually, an old man on a moped pulls up alongside me and beckons me to climb on the back. The man has a broad and friendly smile revealing Gothic teeth. He is

wearing a pink, open-face helmet and a tatty leather jacket. He has no spare helmet and his bike is as decrepit as his dentistry, but this is my only chance to reach the station, so I hop on the back.

The man takes off at a buttock-clenching pace and weaves through the cars and trucks to the other side of the station, where I disembark a little shakily, give him a few notes, and thank him with the enthusiasm of the condemned man reprieved.

It turns out not have been worth either of our efforts. After wandering around the station for a while, I am told by a railway functionary that the Ahn exhibition hall has been removed. Apparently this happened soon after the Americans installed their THAAD anti-missile system in South Korea. The museum's closure was a protest by the Chinese government at what it interpreted as South Korea's collusion with America in a threatening act toward them. Ahn's memory, then, was nothing more than another pawn in the great political game.

BEIJING

I always understood that World War II began on September 1, 1939, when Britain and France declared war on Germany, but there is a strong case to make that it started by accident more than two years earlier, right here at the Marco Polo Bridge, on July 7, 1937.

The exact chain of events has always been disputed. What we do know is that night there was a skirmish between Japanese and Chinese troops, both of whom were stationed beside the bridge in Wanping, ten miles southwest of Beijing. Some say the Japanese accused the Chinese of kidnapping one of their soldiers and demanded to be allowed access to their camp to retrieve him, but were denied. Another version has the Chinese Nationalist troops opening fire on a group of Japanese soldiers who refused to answer their “friend or foe” call. Whatever the truth, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident pushed the long-strained relations between China and Japan into a full-on war lasting eight years and resulting in fourteen million deaths and eighty million refugees.

Beijing was still under Chinese nationalist rule at the time, but Japanese troops had been stationed outside Wanping since 1901 as part of an agreement following the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-colonial uprising that had been crushed by an alliance of Western and Japanese forces (back when Japan was still a Western partner). In 1937 the demoralized Chinese 29th

Corps was stationed within spitting distance of Japanese troops, who were exultant from their military successes in northern China and hungry for more. A militarist faction in Tokyo had been urging further expansion in China, but others, including the emperor, were concerned this would weaken the Japanese front with Russia. The shots fired at the Marco Polo Bridge that night would take the decision out of their hands.

I have taken the train to Wanping after returning to Beijing from my Harbin trip, and walk across the elegant white granite bridge, decorated with hundreds of carved lions. It isn't actually called the Marco Polo Bridge. Foreigners have always referred to it by the name of the Italian traveler who first brought it to the attention of the West, describing it as being "so beautiful that there is hardly another that can rival it," but in China it is called the Lugou Bridge and is the oldest in the country, dating from 1192. Remarkably, it was still serving motorized traffic as recently as the 1980s.

I walk on through Wanping's double gate and fortified walls, which still bear the bullet holes from the fighting of 1937. There is a touristy high street on which I find the Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. As with the vast National Museum in central Beijing, which I had visited the previous day, this one boldly claims that Mao's Communists resisted and defeated Japan almost single-handedly after Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists "gave away" northeast China to the Japanese.

To the Communist Party of China (CPC), history is a malleable thing that can be changed according to its needs. In early 2017 it was reported that the CPC was even extending the time-frame of the war itself. Previously, Chinese children were taught that the war started here in 1937, but it is now being described in Chinese history textbooks as the "14 year War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression," backdated to the original invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

One thing does remain consistent: the crimes of the Japanese Kwantung Army. This is how the museum presents them:

They brutally slaughtered, persecuted and destroyed Chinese people ... cruelly killed war captives, enslaved laborers, forced “comfort women” into service, launched bacterial and chemical warfares, conducted colonialism in occupied regions, promoted enslaving education, poisoned the Chinese people with opium, controlled China’s economic lifelines in areas such as mining, transportation, culture, finance and trade and plundered China’s economic and cultural resources, committing numerous criminal offenses, bringing forth great sufferings to the Chinese people and leaving the darkest page in the history of modern civilization.

In the final rooms of the museum is the evidence, including numerous gruesome photographs of the slaughter of Chinese people. One shows five severed heads of Chinese civilians dangling from a post; others feature villagers being buried alive by Japanese troops, and the corpses of toddlers poisoned in the May 1942 Beituan Massacre in Hebei Province; there are corpses lining the riverbank in Nanjing; and one picture of live prisoners being used for bayonet practice. Beside the photos is an actual Japanese torture device, supposedly used in China in the 1930s: a cylindrical metal cage, its interior lined with spikes, iron maiden–style, into which victims were placed and rolled around.

Though just about everything has changed in this country since 1945, the war lives on in the collective memory of the Chinese people, and not just thanks to museums such as this; they are also reminded of Japanese crimes daily, via their televisions.

As I traveled through eastern China, virtually every day, flicking through the TV channels in my various hotel rooms, I would come across a drama about the war. These series tended to conform to a basic template: the Japanese officers are pantomime sadists, garden-variety mustache-twirling baddies, pitiless in their slaughter of innocents, while the Chinese troops were lighthearted, uncomplicatedly heroic, ready to sacrifice their lives for their comrades. And good-looking. Among their number there was always an improbably young and attractive woman, whose beau was usually captured by the Japanese and tortured, sometimes to death,

accompanied by maniacal cackling. In the end, though, the cowardly, dishonorable Japanese would always be undone by some brilliantly clever plan concocted by the Chinese, who were always Communists, never nationalists.

(Similar anti-Japanese wartime dramas are also hugely popular in South Korea. In Seoul a week or so earlier, I had been to see a new movie, *The Battleship Island* (directed by Ryoo Seung-wan), set in the final weeks of World War II and following a group of desperate, unemployed Koreans tricked by the Japanese into working as forced laborers in the notorious coal mines of Hashima Island. The film was easy enough to follow. Again, all the Japanese characters were sadists: the camp commander actually did have a twirly mustache; another officer had a Hitler mustache. Spoiler alert: At the end of the film, the bandleader dies in his daughter's arms, but it was the very last seconds of the film that stayed with me. The daughter is in tears at her father's death, but then she suddenly stops crying, and for the final few seconds of the film looks defiantly straight into the camera. That look electrified those around me in the huge IMAX theater in Seoul, expressing determination, hatred, revenge, and, I guess, *han*. As the house lights went up, the young woman in the seat next to me was sobbing loudly. I turned to see an elderly Korean couple behind me. The wife was struggling down the stairs, so I gave her my hand. "Did you understand it?" the woman asked me. I did, I said. What did she think of it? I asked. "The Japanese," she replied, with a stern look. "We must never forget what they did to us." *The Battleship Island* went on to break South Korean box office records.)

"Chinese people don't really take those entertainments seriously," Dr. Sun Cheng, a former foreign policy adviser to the Chinese government, tells me when I meet him later in the day at my hotel in central Beijing. On his visits to Tokyo, Japanese politicians often used to complain to Dr. Cheng that China should restrict these kinds of dramas, but he didn't take them seriously. "You know, the viewers see the Japanese soldiers are so weak, and they ask, 'Well, why did the war continue for eight years, then?'"

A Chinese student I talk to in Shanghai later in my trip told me, "The younger generation are tired of those grand, nationalistic dramas. They are

all so melodramatic.” He admitted that his peers could still be quite nationalistic, “but they aren’t xenophobic,” and, often, when he had seen anti-Japanese comments online, they had been accompanied by others telling the anti-Japanese commenters to pipe down: “They’ll write ‘Why are you talking about this? We’re trying to watch a food video!’” Another Chinese student I correspond with via email confirmed that his peers aren’t really buying the CPC’s nationalism: “If someone sings the national anthem loudly in school, all their classmates will think they are really strange.”

Nevertheless, forces within the Communist Party—not to mention the South Korean entertainment industry—clearly believe it is worth keeping anti-Japanese sentiment simmering, until, as happens from time to time, they need it to boil over. One example of this came in 2012 following the nationalization of the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands by the Japanese government. The eight lumps of rock in question, midway between Taiwan and Okinawa in the East China Sea, have been the source of ongoing tension between Japan and China, and also Taiwan for years. Japan administered the Senkakus from 1895 as part of its Taiwan booty from the first Sino-Japanese War. When Japan surrendered in 1945, the islands fell under US government control, but were combined with nearby Okinawa as part of a hand-back to Japan in 1972. The Taiwanese protested, but nothing much happened until some silly buggers from a right-wing Japanese group stunt-landed on the islands in 1996 (access to which is forbidden by the Japanese because they know it upsets the Chinese) and built a lighthouse. Cue protests in China and Taiwan, and more silly buggers, this time from Hong Kong carrying out their own landings on the islands. There was another fight in 2010 when a Chinese fishing trawler hit a Japanese patrol boat near the islands, but in 2012 it all really kicked off when yet another band of silly buggers from Hong Kong landed there, setting off further tit-for-tat landings.

This time the dispute erupted, and in Beijing, the Japanese ambassador’s limousine was attacked, a protestor ripping the flag from its hood. Ambassador Niwa Uichiro, inside the car at the time, was shaken but unhurt. “They were only students,” Niwa, now seventy-nine, told me when I met him in Tokyo. “I was a student demonstrator in the sixties, I had the

same experience. He was a young, crazy boy. I am not afraid of that.” Meanwhile, Ishihara Shintaro, then governor of Tokyo and an outspoken right-wing nationalist, was campaigning to raise funds to buy three of the islands from their private Japanese owners. Ironically, Niwa was, and remains, a moderate and warned against the nationalization of the islands. Still, the attack on his ambassadorial car shocked Japan, and Niwa was recalled to Tokyo. The Japanese government proceeded to purchase three of the islands for around \$20 million in an attempt to damp down the issue, but the Chinese reacted again with violent protests in several cities across China over three days, forcing Japanese factories in China to close temporarily. Some believe the protests were staged or encouraged by the Chinese government—or at the very least, the government could easily have prevented them; it’s not like they don’t have expertise in controlling public protests. But things seem to have escalated beyond the government’s control in Xi’an, in Shaanxi Province, when a Chinese man was dragged from his car and beaten just because he was driving a Japanese car.

These days Japan does seem to have the most substantial claim to the islands, but they would be of great value to China militarily because they lie in a crucial sea lane between Taiwan and Japan. Ownership would also bring an expansion of China’s “exclusive economic zone,” allowing it to tap the oil, gas, and other mineral reserves believed to lie beneath the seabed around the islands. These are not to be sniffed at; one estimate put the reserves as enough to fuel China for eighty years or more. But, as with the Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute with South Korea, from the point of view of the Japanese, it is as much a demonstration of resolve on their part. The issue remains on standby, one feels, should it need to be reactivated by the Chinese.

“Personally, I am very worried, very pessimistic about the future of these two countries,” Dr. Sun Cheng tells me when I ask for his more general predictions for Sino-Japanese relations. He points to the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s as the moment when relations began to deteriorate. The USSR was a kind of common enemy for Japan, the United States, and even China, but these days China sees Japan and the United States as rivals, particularly in maritime terms. “Japan thinks China is a

threat, but China really wants to get a good relationship with Japan, but it seems that Japan doesn't want to establish a good relationship with China," says Dr. Cheng. He places a good deal of the blame for the poor postwar China-Japan relations on the Americans, drawing a comparison with postwar Europe: "They supported the uniting of Europe to fight back against the Soviet Union, so Germany gave very strong and firm apologies, but the United States has not supported Asian unity in the same way because China had a different political ideology."

Things are escalating militarily. China now has the world's second-largest armed forces, while Japan's military spending is at its highest level ever. In 2018 the countries spent \$161 billion and \$46 billion on their respective militaries. Writing in *The Guardian* recently, former Beijing correspondent for the *Financial Times* Richard McGregor warned that the two countries could go to war "within the coming decades." The oft-quoted Thucydides trap posits that, as with Sparta and Athens, a rising power and an existing great power are destined to go to war. It has almost become a cliché to predict this outcome for China and the United States, but it is not unthinkable that Japan could be China's opponent in a future conflict. Dr. Cheng believes that the two countries have lost all mutual trust, partly because the "Japanese government doesn't teach their citizens enough about the war." I point out that NHK, the Japanese state broadcaster, had recently screened a thorough investigation of Unit 731. The Chinese citizens were "really happy about that," Dr. Cheng says, but he thinks that Japan's growing militarism is creating instability. Japan has always had this idea of itself as the savior of Asia in the face of Western imperialism, something Dr. Cheng feels is rather ironic, given that after the war Japan became a de facto colony of America. "Japan needs to learn to respect contemporary China and what it has achieved and get rid of this superiority complex. Unless it does this, there are only going to be problems in the future," he tells me. He believes China is seeking better relations with Korea as a bulwark against Japan, and that should North and South Korea reunify and the Americans leave, Korea will become an ally of China. That will be bad news for Japan and America. "It is one of the most complicated issues in the world." He sighs.

Not everyone agrees with the predictions of war between China and Japan. Xiao Ren, of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai and previously the first secretary at the Chinese embassy in Tokyo, told me that the idea was a “ridiculous” prospect. Everyone was militarizing, he said, but things had stabilized between the two countries, and besides, Japan was only a middle-ranking power and had been for years. “China’s GDP is now more than double Japan’s.” As a result, the Chinese didn’t really worry that much about the Japanese, although that was a difficult thing for the Japanese to adjust to, more in terms of their state of mind than anything.

“As a nation, as a people, they are ambiguous, vague,” Xiao added. He felt that the Japanese had not “sincerely condemned” their past, pointing to their history textbooks, which describe the imperial army as “entering” China rather than “invading” it. He firmly believed there was such a thing as a national character, and the Japanese had been shaped by being an isolated island nation: “They always reserve something. I know Americans who have interacted with Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese and they always find that Chinese are easier to make friends with. If you compare the Japanese to Germans [in terms of war apologies], there must be something very deeply different in their psyches.”

Now we were getting to the nub of the matter. Dr. Sun Cheng had said something similar: “The Japanese mind is different from other people’s.” He and Xiao were suggesting that, deep down, in their very souls, there was something *not quite right* about the Japanese, an indifference, a lack of empathy, a superiority complex, that makes them capable of committing the grossest atrocities upon their fellow men. I would hear this again and again from Koreans and Chinese during my travels.

The Chinese television journalist Dai Wenming said it to me when I met her in Shanghai: “There is something wrong with the Japanese national character: it can go to extremes. When they make things, they make them perfect, they go to extremes. When they are cruel, they go to extremes as well. I do think there is a red line which goes from that to fascism. Historians say don’t generalize, but I think there is something particular about the Japanese.”

Others took an even stronger view: “Barbarians. Savages. Devils, Japanese devils, that’s the common take,” said Chang Chihyun, a Taiwanese historian Dai introduced me to in Shanghai, when I asked him about Chinese perceptions of the Japanese. Chang teaches in Shanghai and was regularly surprised by his students’ views of the Japanese. “[My students think] there is something wrong with them. They are evil—as if it is a definite truth. They love Japanese culture, they like each other in many ways, but they also weigh history. The Chinese are very aware that the Japanese can be extremely savage, particularly when you are weak. There is always that awareness in the back of the mind.” One Chinese student I asked about this believed it was the influence of Bushido culture that set the Japanese apart. This was the samurai moral code—*bushido* means “way of the warrior”—revived by the militarists during the later years of Japanese imperialism and which focused on a kind of devotional self-sacrifice, epitomized by the act of seppuku (ritual suicide) and the kamikaze.

Certainly, trust between the two nations remains low: in a 2016 poll, more than 80 percent of Japanese people responded that they did not trust China. A 2017 joint survey of 2,500 people by Japanese think-tank Genron NPO and the China International Publishing Group revealed that 90 percent of Japanese people had an “unfavorable” or “relatively unfavorable” impression of China, while 67 percent of Chinese felt that way about the Japanese. Encouragingly, 44 percent of Chinese people wanted to visit Japan, and the percentage of Japanese people who thought that relations between China and Japan were “bad” or “relatively bad” had fallen to 45 percent from 72 percent the previous year—the first time it had gone below 50 percent in the seven years of the survey. Negative views of Japan by Chinese people had fallen too, from 78 percent to 64 percent. And both Japanese and Chinese people were more positive about the future relations between the countries.

So from some angles, relations between the China and Japan seem shaky; from others, quite healthy. One hopeful development is the extraordinary growth in tourism from China to Japan in recent years. In 2018 a record number of tourists visited Japan—31 million, continuing the increases of recent years—in large part due to increased cruise-ship traffic

from China. Chinese make up the largest number of visitors—over eight million—slightly ahead of South Koreans, in second place, but account for almost 40 percent of tourist spending in Japan, three times the second-biggest spenders, the Taiwanese. So many Chinese tourists are flying to Nagoya that they are building a second runway at the airport.

“The Chinese are fans of Japanese culture, and it is a top tourist destination because, I tell you what, Japan has things China doesn’t have at the moment: tranquility, attention to details, perfectionism, that’s what we don’t have,” journalist Dai Wenming told me. “And Japan is admired for being able to protect its heritage very well, while here we are losing part of our past.” Despite his criticism, former diplomat Xiao Ren was also a fan of Japan: “There are many things China can and should learn from Japan. We will always see it as an important neighbor. It’s clean, orderly, people are polite, so when they return from Japan, they only say nice things.” Dr. Sun Cheng too had great respect for contemporary Japan: “It is a highly developed country—economically, its education, science, civilization. Their products are really high-quality. We Chinese really love to travel there, and though we know our GDP has developed really fast, when we go to Japan, we can see that we will have a way to go to match them. We need Japanese technology, and Japan needs the Chinese market. It’s a good balance.”

“My generation, we are fascinated by Japanese culture, manga, anime. I really want to visit Japan,” Beijing-based student Yao Guiling told me one day when I met him for a coffee in one of the city’s *hutong* alleyways. Yao—English name “Frank”—had contacted me via email a couple of years earlier to ask some questions about a book I had written about Scandinavia, and we had kept in touch. I asked him for one word to sum up Japan. “Harmony,” he said. “All that Chinese people want is a harmonious relationship with Japan. We see more of a threat from America, but even America we look at as both a friend and an enemy.” The Chinese should never forget what the Japanese did to them, “the shame” he called it, and it didn’t help, he felt, that the Japanese still hadn’t apologized properly. “Maybe the people are sincere, and some scholars, but the government is not good. They have not said, ‘We did it and we are sorry from the bottom of our heart.’ They cannot just put history aside. Facts are facts.”

Sometimes this “fascination” with Japanese culture expresses itself in unexpected ways. The Chinese can’t get enough of Japanese porn, for instance. Former Japanese porn star Aoi Sora has over 18 million followers on Weibo, China’s version of Twitter, making her more popular than most American pop and movie stars. When she announced her engagement in early 2018, the post got several million likes. And then you have *jingri*. This roughly translates as “Japanese in spirit” and is a category of cosplay in which Chinese people, exclusively men, from what I’ve seen, identify as Japanese. The *jingri*’s particular fetish is for the pre-1945 Japanese imperial army. In 2017 two *jingri* made headlines in the Chinese media when they were arrested, dressed as Japanese imperial soldiers, posing in front of a massacre site just outside Nanjing. Others have been caught posing in costume in front of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall. As a result there were calls to make wearing the old imperial Japanese military uniform illegal. China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, called them “scum among the Chinese people.”

Back at the war museum near the Marco Polo Bridge, the final rooms bring me up-to-date on Sino-Japanese relations. There is a warning that the world must be on “high alert for wrongdoings” on the part of the Japanese, such as historical revisionism, comfort women denial, and Yasukuni shrine visits, but also an insistence that those relations are now characterized by “Peace and friendship.” There is a photograph from May 1995 of then Japanese prime minister Murayama Tomiichi visiting the museum.

In the visitor’s book, Murayama wrote the following: “Face history, and pray for permanent peace between China and Japan.”

QUFU

I have come to see a limestone cave on the side of a mountain half an hour's drive outside the city of Qufu in Shandong Province. It's not much of a cave. I have to crouch to see inside. There are no prehistoric drawings or majestic stalactites within, but it is a very important cave because two and a half thousand years ago, the baby Kong Fuzi laid his legendarily ugly head right here and suckled from a tiger as an eagle fanned him with its wings to keep him cool in the summer heat wave.

Kong Fuzi is better known as Confucius, the great sage of Asia. His father, Shuliang He, was the governor of the district, so presumably the family was relatively well-to-do and of high standing. So why was his wife giving birth in such discomfort? One story has it that she was caught short on her way home, but another legend tells that Confucius was such an unsightly baby that his parents abandoned him here on the side of the mountain. He was then adopted by the tiger, who brought him to this cave to feed him while the eagle kept the unprepossessing child cool.

He was worth the effort. Confucius is considered one of the greatest moral teachers in history, whose seminal writings, *The Analects*, emphasize among other things the importance of education and obedience within hierarchies. In 500 BC, China was an agricultural society, so *The Analects* have plenty of analogies featuring yokes and plows. The country was also a

patchwork of warring regions, not yet unified, so he also had lots to say about living in harmony with others, and he described five key relationships in which one figure is duty bound to obey a superior. They are:

Ruler to subject

Master to servant

Parent to child

Husband to wife

Friend to friend (the only equal relationship, assuming it is between two men)

Over the centuries, his teachings have come to mean all sorts of things to all sorts of people, which makes it almost impossible to define what Confucianism, or Neo-Confucianism,¹ really means today, let alone tease out any direct influence on how people actually live. But I'm going to give it a go anyhow.

To reach the Qufu cave, I have taken a high-speed train through the sepia scenery of Eastern China. From Qufu Station, there was then a notably hair-raising taxi ride to Mount Ni in the countryside, twenty miles southeast of the city. My taxi driver doesn't so much drive as careen, the car emitting ominous death rattles as all the dashboard warning lights flash like some mad slot machine. At one point an alarm sounds. He pays it no heed. Outside, traffic lights of various hues blur by. Red, green, orange—they don't matter. They are just lights. Finally, we come to a halt in some kind of illegal dump wasteland, the parking lot at the entrance to the site of Confucius's birthplace.

There is not another soul here, apart from the napping ticket clerk in his kiosk, and I see no one else during my entire visit to the rambling temple complex up among the pine forest. Where is everyone? By coincidence, I had visited Bethlehem a few weeks earlier with my family and queued for an hour as part of an unexpectedly rowdy crowd attempting to force its way down into the subterranean cave where Confucius's Middle Eastern counterpart was born. So, Jesus 1, Confucius 0.

Later that day, back in Qufu, I wander through the massive Confucian temple in the center of the city and end up at the great man's grave. Again, I

have the place virtually to myself. On this evidence, the appeal of Confucius to modern Chinese tourists seems limited, but Qufu still milks its cash cow for all he is worth, branding itself as the Oriental Holy City (though Confucius was neither holy, nor his philosophy a religion).

What is the truth about Confucius's influence on contemporary China and beyond? I want to find out more about the great sage in the hope that it will help me better understand why East Asian societies function as they do, but also perhaps to gain some insight into the interaction *between* the nations. I had formed a theory that Confucius's ideas had brought a uniquely toxic edge to the twentieth-century conflicts between Japan, China, and Korea and their aftermaths. For centuries, China had been the Middle Kingdom, the center of the civilized world—the elder brother, in Confucian terms. From China had flowed, downward, all the blessings of agriculture, writing, bureaucracy, porcelain, philosophy, religion, and so on. These technologies and knowledge passed through the Korean Peninsula before eventually filtering down to Japan, a process that created its own hierarchy of civilization, prestige, and power between China, Korea, and Japan—a tributary system in which Korea and Japan, from time to time, offered symbolic gifts or paid respect to China in return for favorable status, with Korea as the middle brother and Japan as the youngest and, in the Confucian order of things, lowest in status of the siblings. So imagine the upset when, for fifty years or so, the little brother attacked, annexed, and invaded his elder siblings, raping, pillaging, and killing hundreds of thousands of Koreans and Chinese, upon their departure in 1945, bequeathing them a legacy of half a century more suffering, admittedly often self-inflicted. Japan of course also suffered the devastation of mass—and atomic—bombing the same year, but within twenty years had righted itself and, economically at least, inverted the hierarchy all over again, dominating the region as the wealthiest nation for another half century. So the little brother had trounced his elder siblings not once, but twice, a heinous Confucian transgression.

This notion of an ancient geopolitical family hierarchy in East Asia is hardly an original one, and many take issue with it. For a start, perspectives differ depending on which state you identify with. Bruce Cumings, author

of numerous books and articles on Korea, advises us not to fall into the trap of thinking of Korea as the middle brother in the Confucian family. “Korea was never ‘Sinicized,’” he writes, adding that it would be improbable if Chinese culture simply passed down through the peninsula, unaltered, to the Japanese; the Koreans adapted Chinese teaching as the Romans did with Greek civilization. “The real story is ... the unstinting Koreanization of foreign influence, and not vice versa,” he writes. Korea may have been a tributary state of China, or even more a subordinate vassal, but often this was on Korea’s terms because it suited the Koreans at the time; they required Chinese military support against Japan, for instance.

At the fourteenth-century Confucian temple in Beijing (where I spotted a photograph on display showing Japanese soldiers offering sacrifices there in 1938), I had asked a couple of visitors, two men in their early thirties, whether they felt Confucius had anything to say about contemporary China. They had looked at me as if I were asking them whether foot-binding was still a thing. Yet in a recent BBC Radio 4 documentary, Rana Mitter, director of the University China Center at the University of Oxford, whose knowledge of China is beyond reproach, described Confucius as “the man who gave China its cultural DNA.” Mitter believes his legacy continues into the present day.

One Chinese student I got talking to at a coffee shop just after I had visited the Beijing temple agreed that Confucianism had had a very deep influence on his education and on contemporary Chinese society. You could see it in the way that older people were respected in China today, on public transport for instance, he said. The young man believed there were important lessons to be learned from Confucius’s writings—“We very truly value them”—but conceded that they had also been misused by unscrupulous rulers to control, exploit, and oppress the people.

Superficially at least, Mao Zedong and Park Chung-hee both did their best to eradicate Confucianism from their respective societies, the former because he judged it to be oppressively anti-egalitarian, the latter because it conflicted with his capitalistic ambitions. But you could argue that communism and Confucianism have some synergies: both address the challenges of how individuals function within collective societies, and

neither have any time for mysticism or gods. Confucius was certainly an egalitarian when it came to education. And Chairman Mao's *Little Red Book* owed at least a formal debt to *The Analects*. The CPC is keenly aware that social order in China is very much dependent on its continuing to deliver economic development and stability, which chimes with Confucian notions of the responsibility of rulers and is perhaps why the Chinese people tolerate the current restrictions on their liberty—even the younger Chinese I speak to never seem especially worked up about democratic reform: it is a classically Confucian trade. And it is telling that the Chinese cultural institutions the state is opening around the world—their answer to the British Council—are called Confucius Institutes. Meanwhile, in terms of President Park's economic miracle in South Korea, his chaebol did—and still do—seem to function on Confucian principles, with the “I-know-my-place” deference of the workers and blind obedience to superiors within the corporate hierarchies. And the Koreans' mania for education is straight out of the Confucian playbook too.

Later on, visiting Taiwan, I asked people there whether theirs was a Confucian society. The consensus was not. “The word ‘Confucian’ is just tossed around by journalists, but no one ever unpacks it to see what it means,” said American lecturer and Taiwan expert Michael Turton. “It could mean so many things. It is a Western term, used by Westerners to tell Westerners what's going on: If I tell you this is Confucian, I mean it is authoritarian and hierarchical. But when you look at the legislature in Taiwan, 40 percent is female. There are female business owners, female academics. Women wield a lot of power here.” It does seem that Taiwan has broken free from the Confucian loop.

Accusations of generalization, Orientalism, or “cultural essentialism” can also be leveled should one suggest that some or other behavior has its roots here in this cave outside Qufu. For instance, the American journalist Malcolm Gladwell was criticized by some in Korea when he suggested in his book *Outliers* that repeated, fatal errors by Korean Air pilots were due to what he termed Korea's “cultural legacy,” by which he basically meant a Confucian deference to superiors by copilots: Gladwell implied that they were afraid to draw the pilots' attention to, say, the mountain looming

ahead, or the flaming engines, that kind of thing. His theory does seem a bit ridiculous, but then you go to Korea, or you read anything about Korea, or you meet actual Koreans, and, well, you can't help but see *everything* through a Confucian filter. Korea is often held to be the most Confucian society on earth; some Koreans even claim him as one of their own, based on rather sketchy claims that Confucius's grandfather was born in Korea. The first Confucian school was founded there in AD 372, and it adopted China's bureaucratic entrance exam system for centuries. Confucian thinkers still feature on bank notes.

A few years ago, the book *Confucius Must Die for the Country to Live* was a bestseller in South Korea, laying just about every lamentable aspect of Korean society at the feet of the bearded one. Bruce Cumings believes Confucianism also reigns in North Korea: "The assumption that North Korean communism broke completely with the past would blind one to continuing Confucian legacies there: its family-based politics, the succession to rule of the leader's son, and the extraordinary veneration of the state's founder, Kim Il-sung."

Public manifestations of Korean-Confucian male entitlement occasionally go viral these days, to highly entertaining effect. When politician Kim Moo-sung, once considered a presidential hopeful, arrived at Gimpo International Airport back in 2016, film footage showed him swaggering through the automatic doors of the arrivals hall, thrusting his canary-yellow suitcase off to be caught by a bowing aide who had been waiting obediently to receive it. Kim didn't acknowledge the man or even break stride, but, staring straight ahead, kept on walking, presumably to his chauffeured limo, as he sent his suitcase spearing off at a tangent like a booster rocket from a space shuttle launch. The viral video provoked amused horror worldwide, leading to discussion of the treatment of subordinates by powerful Koreans. Kim responded to the attention with confused indignation.

So much of how Koreans conduct themselves and interact with one another seems to be determined by Confucian hierarchies, even in the supposedly relaxed environs of bars and restaurants. When you say "cheers" and raise your glass, you should be careful not to raise it higher

than your elders or superiors, for instance. And Koreans simply cannot bear to see a solo diner refill his own glass.

One night, in Gwangjang Market in Seoul, I sat at a counter around one of the open kitchens, eating *bindaetteok* (mung bean pancakes). Beside me were two men in their early twenties, enjoying some sashimi. We exchanged pleasantries, and then they left me to my meal, but each time I went to refill my cup of *makgeolli*—a yeasty, milky fermented rice drink—they would literally flinch in pain. The younger one, seated farthest from me, would instinctively reach out to take the bottle to refill my glass, just as Confucian protocol dictated, before pulling himself back. Eventually, I felt compelled to ask about all this. It was an instinct, the younger man told me, laughing. Something he had done all his life. I was curious how Koreans managed this kind of Confucian social ranking on a day-to-day basis. How was one person's superiority ascertained by the parties in a conversation and then expressed?

"There is the polite way of speaking and the impolite way," explained the elder of the two men. "It's not so much about social status or money, although if it is obvious that someone is rich, then you might be more polite to them; age is the first, most important thing, and then gender. But unfortunately, older people often too easily choose the impolite way of speaking to younger people." If in doubt, one Korean will ask how old the other is, and adjust their mode of address accordingly using one of seven different forms. "When you meet someone for the first time, if you think that you are going to have more to do with them in the future, you will just ask, so that you know whether to use the polite form or not." The younger of the two will thereafter treat the elder with deference, agreeing with his opinions, laughing at his jokes, pouring his drinks, and so on.

I attempted a little impromptu role play.

"So, you'd say, like, 'Hi, Alan, my name's John. We're going to be working on this project together...'"

My fellow diners nodded.

"And then you'd ask, 'So, how old are you?'"

"Yes, that's how it would be, right at the beginning of the conversation, just like that. Among students we might just use the impolite form, no

matter what the age. There is a kind of anti-ageism culture now.”

We continued for a while, with me offering various scenarios—what if you were richer than your teacher, or she was female and you were male? (“Of course, you would respect her because she is a teacher and so of higher rank than any student”—but in most circumstances, women ranked lower than men.)

I had assumed it was a question of using the imperative form when one was being less polite—“Tell me the way to the station” instead of “Would you mind telling me...,” that kind of thing. But apparently it is all in the conjugation of the verb. “If you put something like *yo* at the end of the verb, like *ka-yo*, then that is the polite way. If you just use *ka*, then that’s the impolite way,” the elder of the two men told me.

Yet even in Korea, the most Confucian society on earth, there are things that are decidedly *un*-Confucian. The way the chaebol are structured conforms to Confucian protocol; their bosses turning up in court in wheelchairs, with intravenous drips, feigning illness and denying responsibility for their crimes, does not. An essential element of Confucianism is that leaders have a responsibility to act honorably, to “exercise government by means of virtue,” as Confucius put it, but that is rarely how the chaebol families roll. And where is the Confucian veneration for the elders in the Korean obsession with employing plastic surgery to look younger?

Back in Qufu, after another taxi death race back to town from Confucius’s birth-cave, I check in to my hotel. It is a strange place, a complex of ersatz traditional houses ranged around a concrete garden in the shadow of the old city walls. With the city empty of tourists, they have given me an entire house to myself. Designed to cater to the special requirements of Confucian scholars, it has an office with an ornately carved desk equipped with brush pen and ink, and behind it a large bookcase lined with the great sage’s works.

On my last afternoon in Qufu, I look around the temple complex. It is over a thousand years old, with stone pillars carved with dragon reliefs, ancient cedar trees propped up on wooden supports, and beautiful pavilions with yellow-and-green-tiled roofs and triple-upturned eaves, including the

Xingtian Pavilion, where Confucius is said to have lectured. In one of the buildings are some inlaid panels depicting scenes from Confucius's life, rendered using semiprecious stones. They show him in the traditional manner, with flowing blue robes and a triple-peaked hat. His heavyset face and thick black beard put me in mind of a Chinese Barry White. In the oldest existing illustrations of Confucius's life (of any Chinese life), thirty-six woodblock prints from 1444, I learn of his birth, when a unicorn came by with a heavenly book in its mouth. Unicorns were a recurring visitor to Confucius, apparently. He once got very upset over the killing of a unicorn and decried the lack of morality and justice in China. Then, according to the English translation, there was the time he "lived on vegetarian and prayed to the Big Dipper." Often dragons also descended for reasons I couldn't really follow, and on one occasion, as Confucius was praying, a rainbow appeared and then turned into a piece of yellow jade, which must have been nice.

I walk out of the temple grounds and continue past the city walls to the cemetery where Confucius was buried when he died, aged seventy-three, in 479 BC. As I stand amid the gloomy pines looking at his surprisingly simple, grass-covered burial mound, I try to sum up my conclusions about the great sage and his legacy in these countries.

All those supposedly Confucian characteristics—the emphasis on education, respect for elders, valuing the family, a desire to avoid losing face, the sexism, the entitled old men—you find them everywhere in the world, don't you? Patriarchal hierarchies and class systems are, unfortunately, universal. I think about that old *Frost Report* "Class" sketch, with John Cleese looking down on Ronnie Barker, who looks down on Ronnie Corbett, who knows his place. I can well imagine old Kong Fuzi would have nodded along contentedly to that. And plenty of countries hate one another without having 2,500 years of indoctrination by a strange-looking man raised by a tiger and an eagle upon whom to place the blame.

In the late 1990s Geir Helgesen, a Danish sociologist, conducted a survey of Asians and Scandinavians that, among other things, asked whether they agreed with the proposition "The ideal society is like a family": 80 percent of Chinese and South Koreans agreed, but so did over

70 percent of Scandinavians, for whom Confucius is about as relevant as the preachings of TV evangelists. In other words, perhaps Confucius resonates for Asians simply because his teachings are universal—they speak to us all.

NANJING

I arrive in Nanjing by high-speed train. Straight away, it seems like a city in which one might actually want to live, unlike somber, neurotic Beijing, or ossified Qufu.

Nanjing has been the capital of China at various points in the country's history, and it still has some of that grandeur, with broad, tree-lined avenues and lively public spaces that are transformed with futuristic light shows at night. It feels as if I have finally arrived in the twenty-first century. There is even a public bike rental scheme, although the locals tend to leave the bicycles piled on the sidewalk as if for a bonfire when they are finished with them.

Above all, Nanjing has really great food, and a lot of it is Japanese. In fact, I will see more Japanese restaurants here than in any other Chinese city: *izakaya*, sushi, ramen, *donburi*, and yakitori places galore; there are even Japanese convenience stores. The Hello Kitty Café is doing a roaring trade too, and in an underground mall I see Japanese patisseries, retail brands like Muji and Uniqlo, and one shop just called Japanese Designer Brand. There is even a vending machine dispensing live crabs. It doesn't get much more Japanese than that.

I resist drawing any trite conclusions about the relationship between the people of Nanjing and their former Japanese occupiers from all this, but do

decide to take it as an encouraging sign. At least the Japanese are not considered the mortal enemies they might be here, because, for many still today, the name of this city is synonymous with one of the most depraved, large-scale war crimes ever committed: the Nanjing Massacre of December 1937 to January 1938.

By the autumn of 1937 the Japanese had taken Shanghai and were moving north toward Nanjing. In December, following months of aerial bombing by planes flying from Nagasaki, one hundred thousand troops of the imperial army, under the command of Emperor Hirohito's uncle-by-marriage, Prince Yasuhiko Asaka, entered the capital of China, routing 150,000 Chinese nationalists. They were under orders to take no prisoners. The Chinese retreat turned to chaos. As *The New York Times* reported on December 11, 1938, the disarray was partly the fault of the Chinese commanders: "In many cases the individual [Chinese] generals have been more concerned with the safety of their personal wealth and their vast landholdings in the path of the Japanese invaders than with the defense of the city." On December 13, many Chinese soldiers were still trapped within the city walls as the Japanese embarked on a murderous spree that lasted several weeks. The scale and nature of the killing shocked the world then as it does today. According to one estimate, 57,000 Chinese prisoners were killed at one location alone—near Mufu Mountain, north of the city.

By this stage of their campaign, the Japanese soldiers seemed utterly desensitized to their victims. There were live burials, killing competitions, disembowelings, decapitations, and death by fire. Victims were ordered into freezing ponds; others were attacked by dogs. One soldier, Nagatomi Hakudo, speaking almost sixty years later, recalled what he saw:

... soldiers impaled babies on bayonets and tossed them still alive into pots of boiling water. They gang-raped women from the ages of twelve to eighty and then killed them when they could no longer satisfy sexual requirements. I beheaded people, starved them to death, burned them, and buried them alive, over two hundred in all. It is terrible that I could turn into an animal and do these things.

There are really no words to explain what I was doing. I was truly a devil.

One of the most notorious incidents from the Japanese attack on Nanjing was the “killing contest” between two Japanese sub-lieutenants, Mukai Toshiaki and Noda Takeshi of the Katagiri Unit, at Kuyung in the days just before Nanjing fell. The two men had a wager to see who would be first to behead one hundred Chinese. The competition was reported with great enthusiasm by the *Japan Advertiser* newspaper on December 7, 1937. In the chaos, the two men lost count, and so increased the target to 150 beheadings, which was also reported in the paper. Mukai and Noda were later captured by the Chinese and brought to trial in Nanjing in 1947. Both denied the story, saying it was made-up propaganda. They were executed by firing squad in 1948.¹

Estimates of the death toll between December 1937 and January 1938 range from 50,000 to 300,000, and in some cases more. The latter is the official figure quoted by the Chinese state based on evidence presented at the postwar trials held in Nanjing, but the sheer chaos of war, coupled with the massive movement of refugees in China at the time, make it impossible to verify the true figure. One historian told me, off the record, that none of the Chinese historians he had spoken to believed 300,000 died. They put the death toll at between 50,000 and 80,000, he said, but there does seem to be a general consensus internationally, including at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, of around the 200,000 mark. To put even the lower estimates into context, 61,000 British civilians and 108,000 French civilians died during the *entirety* of World War II.

The taking of Nanjing made headlines around the world even at the time. In his *Sonnets from China*, published in 1939, W. H. Auden drew a clear line from the Chinese capital to the Nazi death camps in his poem “Here War Is Simple,” where he compared Nanjing and Dachau, “where life is evil now.”

Today there are Japanese people who deny the Nanjing Massacre ever took place. One Japanese historian has written that precisely forty-seven Chinese civilians died. Others quibble about the definition of *massacre*, or

the time frame (was it the first week after the Japanese arrived, or six weeks thereafter, as prescribed by the 1946 Tokyo trials?), and how to define “Nanjing”—does this mean the entire district, or just within the city walls? The deniers include the self-appointed Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, a Japanese right-wing group that has a conspiracy for just about every accusation leveled against the Imperial Army. In terms of Nanjing, they say the Chinese army were the barbarians: it was *they* who burned the city and committed atrocities, and anyone who disagrees is a Communist.

Also among the critics of the accepted Nanjing narrative are prominent Japanese politicians, like the mayor of Nagoya, Kawamura Takashi. In 2012 he made a speech claiming the actions of the Japanese military were “conventional acts of combat.” In 1990 the former governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintaro, told *Playboy* magazine: “People say that the Japanese made a holocaust [in Nanjing], but that is not true. It is a story made up by the Chinese ... it is a lie.” A former minister of education, Fujio Masayuki, dismissed it as “just a part of war.”

A more realistic defense might be that terrible things happen in wars, in all wars; that few nations are innocent when it comes to war crimes; that many armies have operated on a “take no prisoners” policy; and many victorious soldiers have rampaged, raped, and looted the losing side. The My Lai and Amritsar Massacres are two of the better-known occasions on which American and British troops killed unarmed civilians, in Vietnam and India, respectively. During the battle for Okinawa, Americans executed Japanese prisoners too, as did British soldiers in the Burma campaign.

Others try to explain or excuse the brutality of the Japanese troops in Nanjing by pointing to the fact that the Japanese soldiers had themselves been systematically brutalized during their *Bushido*-infused training. The “imperial way,” a kind of emperor-led, spiritual-nationalism, had also programmed them to believe in their own racial superiority, rendering them indifferent to the suffering of their enemies, whom they considered less than human. They were on a mission to “purify” Asia. In his book *Horror in the East* Laurence Rees quotes Tsuchiya Yoshio, a veteran of the Japanese military police who served in China, as saying that they thought of the

Chinese as “like bugs or animals ... The Chinese didn’t belong to the human race.” “I felt like I was just killing animals, like pigs,” Rees quotes another veteran of the army in Northern China as saying. “I thought that this was the way for the Japanese Imperial Army to do things. I was just totally convinced.”

Legitimizing his army’s conduct with his divinity was Emperor Hirohito. Enomoto Masayo, one of the Japanese soldiers caught by the Chinese and tried after the war, testified that “I was fighting for the emperor. He was a god. In the name of the emperor we could do whatever we wanted against the Chinese.” Who knows whether ordinary Japanese soldiers truly believed their actions were sanctioned by this a mystical authority, but this is certainly what they were taught.

For decades after the end of the war, the crimes of the Japanese did not rank highly among the priorities of the Chinese government, which benefited in various ways from good relations with Tokyo. In a speech in 1964, on the occasion of the visit of the chairman of the Japanese Socialist Party, Mao Zedong said, “Japanese militarism was tremendously advantageous for China, in that it allowed the Chinese people to take back power.” Mao’s gratitude was perhaps double-edged, but it is undeniable that the CPC did benefit from Japan’s colonial war against its rivals, Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalists.

So for many decades, conserving and memorializing the history of what happened in China in the 1930s and early 1940s was mostly left to those who had directly experienced the horror or individuals otherwise motivated to ensure that the events were never forgotten. One of the more remarkable examples of these civic-minded historians is Wu Xianbing, who has single-handedly created a private museum dedicated to the Nanjing Massacre.

“It started off out of pure anger,” Mr. Wu tells me when I visit him at his museum on my second day in the city. “But I realized anger was not enough. I wanted to teach people about what had happened and translate my anger into action.”

Wu is a stocky man in his mid-fifties. Today he is dressed in jeans, a white baseball cap with a red star, and sensible, thick-soled brown shoes. He looks like a factory boss, which, it turns out, is precisely what he is.

When my taxi had deposited me at the address I had been given for his museum, a rather tacky gold-and-red building in a light industrial zone of the city, it had looked to me more like a down-at-heel office, which, again, is precisely what it was. In 2004 Mr. Wu repurposed the administration building for his furniture business into the Museum of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.

I had been expecting a fanatic, but Mr. Wu is an eminently reasonable man. His approach to the war, to the Japanese, and to current relations between the two countries is balanced and lucid. "The point for me is not to evoke hatred or bring out bad memories—it is to show people that this is what has happened, to remember it, and to learn from it," he says as he shows me into his large office, its walls lined with books and bulging files. There are boxes around us on the floor overflowing with yet more papers. He has over forty thousand books on the history of the war, he says, as we sit on a burgundy clamshell three-piece suite away from his cluttered desk.

On my way to meet him, I had visited the official Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall close to the Jiangdong Gate, where the remains of many victims have been found. As with the Unit 731 museum in Harbin, the official Nanjing memorial museum was housed in a dramatic example of modern architecture—a no-expense-spared triangular gray granite monolith surrounded by a gravel park filled with monuments and statues. But, says Mr. Wu, that official museum is "from the point of view of the leaders, the generals, the big players." With his museum he wants to explore the Nanjing Massacre through the perspective of ordinary people. "To show that everyone has their own lives, but war breaks them all. This shows the humanity."

I follow him into a large rectangular room with exhibits ranging from swords to chamber pots, helmets and Japanese flags, newspaper cuttings, and the now familiar photographs of the slaughter. Though clearly curated on a tight budget, it is all well-presented.

Wu's family came to Nanjing after the war, so he has no personal connection to the massacre other than being born here. He felt compelled to start his own museum—funded entirely out of his own pocket—when he read about Japanese prime ministers visiting Yasukuni, the controversial

shrine to Japan's war dead in Tokyo. I point out that they haven't done that for some years now. "Yes, but they still send gifts. Deep down, I don't believe they have acknowledged what they did. Lots of Japanese ask me, 'Why don't you let it go, forget about the past?'" He tells them that China was the victim in this, and victims and perpetrators have different perspectives and different rights. What about all the Japanese restaurants and companies and brands I had been seeing in Nanjing? Doesn't this show that the Chinese people had forgiven and forgotten? "Society is complicated," replies Mr. Wu levelly. "That is economics, it doesn't mean that Chinese people forget history or what they went through during the Japanese occupation." He still believes that the Japanese are withholding evidence about the events of 1937.

Mr. Wu invested a large amount of money to start the museum (he doesn't feel comfortable telling me how much, he says, but I later read it ran to over \$300,000) and has now devoted twelve years of his life to it. He is married, with a grown-up daughter, but his family and friends didn't really understand what he was doing, he says with a shrug. Even with around forty thousand visitors a year, he doesn't make any money from the museum, but in recent years the government has started supporting him financially.

So far, Mr. Wu has been genial and patient. I venture again that perhaps most Chinese people have moved on, and maybe he should consider doing so too. "I agree with you—we should look to the future, but the people who can't let go of the past are the Japanese. From the 1950s to the 1980s, none of this was mentioned in Chinese society. It was only when it became acceptable in the Japanese mainstream to deny history, when the right wing took over, then it became a problem." The first Japanese history textbook denying the massacre (and terming the invasion an "advance" instead) was published in Japan in the early 1980s. The Chinese authorities began building the official Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall in 1984.

"I like Japan. I think modern Japanese society is among the most civilized in the world," continues Mr. Wu. "But most ordinary Japanese, especially the young, they don't know anything of the Japanese history in China; they never mention the massacre, because the politicians try to

suppress this information. School textbooks—how can they use so few words to describe something as big as the Nanjing Massacre? I think a lot of younger Japanese would be shocked if they knew the truth.”

Every time he visits Japan, which he does often, Mr. Wu is disturbed to see there are fewer and fewer books about the Nanjing Massacre. With the help of some Japanese NGOs, in 2014 he took an exhibition of some of his material to Hiroshima and Nagoya. He has had help with fund-raising from “hundreds” of Japanese people over the years, and Japanese people are the most numerous overseas visitors to the museum. He hopes to take his exhibition to Tokyo next year, but hasn’t yet found the right Japanese partner.

“Of course there are trolls, people online; sometimes they write to me and are threatening or get aggressive, but I have never experienced any physical attack. Sometimes they come here.” Japanese right-wingers have visited his museum? I ask, rather astonished. “Yes, I would even say I would call some of them friends. There are different types of right-wingers—center-right, moderate-right, extreme right. Listen”—he stops walking and turns to me—“I believe in communication. Without that, you never get further. There is no point in being angry or getting emotional about one person’s version of history. It is better to know what they are thinking, and use truth to fight them. Why are they saying this? Where do they get their information from?”

What did he say to those who allege that some or all of the evidence about the Nanjing Massacre was fabricated by the Chinese authorities? “There are eight hundred photographs taken of the events, and none of them were taken by Chinese; they were all taken by foreigners, mostly Japanese, but also by the Westerners who were here.” New photographic evidence continues to come to light. In September 2008, for instance, photographs were found in the home of a Kobe resident showing Japanese troops burying Chinese people alive. The photographs were first published by the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. “If these photographs were faked, then they weren’t faked by the Chinese, but the truth is, evidence has come from multiple sources: mostly Japanese, but Americans, Chinese, and Europeans,” says Mr. Wu.

Witnessing the slaughter in the first days after the Japanese arrived, a group of European residents in the city rushed to set up a safety zone for refugees; a similar zone had been set up during the taking of Shanghai earlier in mid-1937. In Nanjing, the group included John Rabe, a German businessman and member of the Nazi Party, who personally harbored six hundred Chinese refugees at his home, earning him the sobriquet “living Buddha.” Today those Europeans are remembered with gratitude by the Chinese for providing a haven for an estimated 250,000 people, and the official Nanjing Massacre museum has a large display dedicated to them. There were also several foreign reporters in the city, including F. Tillman Durdin of *The New York Times* and Charles McDaniel of the Associated Press. In February 1938 an American priest, George Fitch, did much to bring the Nanjing Massacre to the attention of the world by smuggling a Super 8 film made by a missionary named John Magee out of the city and to the United States.

The foreign reporter who did more than anyone else to bring the Nanjing Massacre to the attention of people in the West in more recent years was Chinese-American journalist Iris Chang. In 1997 she published *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, an international bestseller.

From Mr. Wu I learned that there was an entire museum dedicated to Chang, about three hours’ drive north of Nanjing in Huai’an. I visit it the next day, curious to see how the Chinese have memorialized an author who had done so much to bring one of the darkest moments of their recent history to global prominence.

The museum stands alone in the middle of a park overlooked by dozens of thirty-story high rises. It resembles a purpose-built cross between a Chinese mausoleum and a park café. There is nobody guarding the entrance, so I just walk in. It is freezing cold and completely empty of people. Chang gazes down beatifically from portraits, photographs, and plaster busts. There are relics—a sweatshirt, her childhood piano—a mock-up of her bedroom, childhood poems and drawings, and an IQ test from MENSA to illustrate her precocity. A text on display early on reads:

IRIS CHANG
PURE AND INNOCENT
POETIC AND RAINBOW-LIKE

I learn that Chang was the daughter of Chinese-American Harvard graduates and attended the University of Illinois. Her early career was spent rewriting computer software instruction manuals before she got a job at the *Chicago Tribune*. Finally we get to the book, which she began researching in 1993. Chang was outraged by what she saw as the continuing denial of, and refusal to apologize for, the Nanjing Massacre by certain sections of the Japanese establishment, calling it “the second Japanese rape.”

A *PBS NewsHour* television segment from the mid-1990s featuring Chang and the Japanese ambassador to the United States runs on a loop on a screen in the museum. It is captioned: “Iris turned a Japanese ambassador into jelly in less than thirty seconds.”

I watch the film a couple of times. I think it is worth a word-for-word transcription because, in a way, it goes right to the heart of the Japan apology issue. See what you think:

Chang is in the studio with the news anchor, the ambassador is on a live feed. Chang confronts the ambassador.

CHANG: Can the ambassador himself say today, on national TV, live, that he personally is profoundly sorry for the rape of Nanking and other war crimes against China?

AMBASSADOR: We do recognize that acts of cruelty and violence were committed by members of the Japanese military and we are very sorry for that and we understand that the memory of those who suffered lasts long and I personally think that this is a burden which Japanese people will have to carry for a long time.

(He goes on to say that he has examined twenty text books and they all mention Nanjing, and that the Japanese make conscious efforts to teach what happened.)

INTERVIEWER (to Chang): Did you hear an apology?

CHANG: I don't know, did you hear an apology? I didn't really hear the word "apology" that was made. And I think that if he had said genuinely "I personally am sorry for what the Japanese military had done during WWII" I would have considered that an apology, I think that would have been a great step in the right direction. But again there these words such as "regret," "remorse" and "unfortunate things happen," it is because of these types of wording and the vagueness of the expression that the Chinese people are infuriated.

Admittedly, the ambassador is not the most charismatic of characters and he struggles in a second language, but he does *literally* say, "we are very sorry," "live," and "on national TV," as Chang demands. He at no point uses the words "regret," "remorse" or "unfortunate things happen," as she suggests. It is as if she is not really listening, as if she does not want to hear anything but "parsing" and equivocation from the ambassador.

In 2004, following what appears to have been a nervous breakdown, perhaps brought on by the stress of her work on a follow-up book about American prisoners of war in the Philippines, Chang committed suicide, leaving behind a three-year-old son. She had been diagnosed as bipolar and, for some weeks prior to her death, believed she was a target of the CIA and/or Japanese right-wing extremists and the Bush administration.

Chang's book has been criticized by many academics—both Western and Japanese—for its exaggeration (she claims the death toll was "well over" 350,000, for instance), her "emotionalism," and, in likening Nanjing to the Holocaust, of a skewed "comparative victimology." She also skirts over the many Japanese people who have carried out pioneering research in the massacre before her. For three decades beginning in 1965, Japanese historian Ienaga Saburo waged a famous legal battle against the Japanese government regarding what he felt was their suppression of the truth in Japanese history textbooks, for instance. Expressing these kinds of views can be life-threatening in Japan. In 1990 then mayor of Nagasaki Motoshima Hitoshi was shot in the chest for suggesting that Emperor

Hirohito bore some responsibility for the war. Yet from Chang's book, one would conclude that all Japanese were equally in denial.

Mr. Wu is characteristically reasonable when I put the criticisms of Chang to him: "Without her book, a lot of people in the West would not have known about the massacre. I realize people say she exaggerated and was very subjective, but I think she made a great contribution, and the more research is done, the more people realize that her book was accurate."

Chang's conclusion to *The Rape of Nanking* is more conciliatory, rightly pointing out that there is nothing different or "other" about the Japanese. "No race or culture has a monopoly on wartime cruelty," she wrote. All societies are capable of the brutality of Nanjing. "Japan's behavior during World War II was less a product of dangerous people than of a dangerous government, in a vulnerable culture, in dangerous times."

SHANGHAI I

If Nanjing had felt like arriving in the twenty-first century, Shanghai was like an Epcot vision of the future, albeit seen from circa 1988. The evening I arrive by high-speed train, I join the tourist crowds down on the Bund, the iconic Huangpu River embankment lined with turn-of-the-last-century Beaux Arts buildings. These sturdy granite blocks and clock towers once housed the institutions of Western imperialism, although they always remind me of Liverpool's waterfront. These days they contain European luxury brand flagships, five-star hotels, and high-roller restaurants.

Over on the other side of the river, the towers of Pudong are shrouded in clouds this evening. Their red aircraft-warning lights pulse through the mist. It is said that when Pudong was being constructed in the 1990s, they built the equivalent of ten Manhattans within a decade. Today the glassy skyscrapers jostle for attention in the jagged skyline, each a wilder shape than the next. My gaze is drawn to the Shanghai World Financial Center, nicknamed the Bottle Opener on account of the square opening at the top. The story goes that the Mori Building Company, the building's Japanese developers, originally designed the opening as a circle, but the authorities felt this was uncomfortably reminiscent of the sun on the Japanese flag and made them change it.

I cross the river using a weird tourist-tunnel-ride affair that, with its BBC Radiophonic Workshop-style soundtrack and kaleidoscopic light show, makes me feel like I am in the opening credits to *Doctor Who*. Once in Pudong, I visit a similarly kitschy history museum at the base of the Oriental Pearl Tower—one of those cherry-on-a-cocktail-stick affairs—which walks me through the official Chinese version of Shanghai’s recent past. It focuses on the locals’ “heroic” resistance of the “nimble-footed” Western imperialists who commandeered and corrupted the city in the late 1800s with their “Flowery Smoking Houses” (combined opium dens/brothels). Back then, Shanghai had a reputation as a good-time city, the New York of the East, but the pleasures of the few were founded on the miseries of the many. It is no coincidence that the city gave birth to the Communist Party of China in the early 1920s.

I end that first evening’s walk at the former British consulate building, a large, vaguely Mediterranean-looking villa at the far end of the Bund, built in the 1870s with a veranda overlooking a manicured lawn shaded by magnolias. These days it is a posh hotel and bar. It is almost empty as I enter. A pianist plays “Memories.” I order a drink and imagine games of croquet, G&Ts, and Victorian ladies fanning themselves in the heat as coolies labor past on the distant docks bearing tea chests on their backs.

When I first visited Shanghai a few years ago, I’d braced myself for a bland megacity of identikit high-rises and gargantuan shopping malls, but I was instantly captivated. It has what I believe proper travel writers call “texture,” by which I think they mean that you can still see old people sitting in doorways smoking. Away from the luxury brand megastores, Shanghai is still enjoyably chaotic, a great city for flâneurs. This visit, I flân around for a couple of days, mostly in the former French Concession, with its shady avenues lined with plane trees and Art Deco villas, and the brick tenements in Xintiandi, where the Communist Party was founded by Mao in 1921. In the side streets around Nanjing Road, colonial Shanghai’s main drag, grocers, iron mongers, and dumpling sellers jostle for your custom. Scarlet slabs of fresh-ish meat hang over the sidewalk outside open-fronted butchers’ shops. I brush shoulders with a shoulder of pork as I dummy my

way out of the grasp of a seedy individual trying to entice me into one of the many massage parlors here among the tourist hotels.

One evening in Shanghai, I meet up with two young locals, Søren, a friend of a friend from Denmark, and his school friend Ben, at a noodle place on the edge of the French Concession.

Most young Chinese take a Western name at some point, they shout to me above the noise of the packed restaurant as we wait for the waitress to take our order. Søren, twenty-five, had become a fan of Kierkegaard during his time studying philosophy at university (which had taken him to Denmark, where he had met our mutual acquaintance), while Ben, twenty-two, got his name in kindergarten (it means “dumb” in Chinese, so is considered cute). He has friends called “Hulk,” “Apple,” and even “Titty,” he says.

I’d been spending a lot of time in the company of older academics recently, so wanted to hear about things in China from a younger perspective, particularly how they reconcile living under the Communist Party’s restrictions in the social media age.

“Nowadays in China you have young people doing things that nobody in China has ever done before—the internet culture is wild,” says Ben. “And that means the basic conflict is about the obedience of children to parents. We are all trying to negotiate with the older generation to figure out strategies for dealing with them.” There had been a breakdown in communications between parents and children that, though par for the course in the West, was something new for China. Both Søren and Ben, who now work in finance and the tech sector, respectively, had conflicts with their parents, at times even cutting off contact with them for periods of time. Søren knew a girl from his small town in Shandong who left home on the day of her graduation. She had a place at a good university, which was where everyone expected her to go. Shandong is a very conservative province where the conventional path is to strive to become a teacher or an administrator in local government—low-paid drudgery, but a job for life. Instead, she had arranged an internship at a company in Shanghai, and left without telling anyone. “She just took her bags, got on a bus to Jinan, and

transferred to the train to Shanghai. Cut herself off from her family,” Søren marvels.

“Young Chinese people are looking more and more outward. We all want to study abroad,” says Ben, who has studied in the United States. That is the dream: to get to an American university. Xi Jinping’s daughter somehow managed it; she enrolled at Harvard in 2010. The traffic goes both ways—from the West to China. “At my college in Shanghai, we were basically half Chinese students and half international.”

I had assumed both young men were from a middle- or upper-middle-class background, but Ben’s father worked in a factory and his mother was a primary school teacher. He had a traditional childhood in a provincial town, and it hasn’t been an easy transition to move to cosmopolitan Shanghai. “I graduated from this really Chinese, really Communist kind of school, with a strong nationalist identity. When I first came to university here, it was kind of awkward for a while to know how to talk to the other students.”

We talk about the Chinese online message sites, an often bizarre parallel universe where, to circumvent censorship, Xi Jinping is for instance depicted as Winnie the Pooh, and Peppa Pig was banned for a while because Chinese youth somehow adopted the cartoon character as a symbol of gangster culture. Younger people spend a lot of time mocking the older generation online, Ben says. In the run-up to Chinese New Year, a national holiday when everybody is expected to return home, the sites fill up with people offering advice on how to deal with parental interrogations of the “Why aren’t you married yet?” and “How is your promotion coming along?” sort. “The advice was to change the focus—so before Auntie starts asking why you aren’t married yet, you ask her, ‘Happy New Year, Auntie. How is your daughter? Has she found a boyfriend yet?’” says Søren.

Both young men tell me that they circumvent the Great Firewall of China by using VPN (virtual private network) servers, as I am doing while traveling here. In fact, whenever I speak to Chinese people about internet censorship in China, they all say exactly the same thing: that it is terrible, that the government is treating them like children, that it is an infringement of their human rights and ridiculous that a reputed thirty thousand or so

government employees work full-time monitoring the discussion sites, and so on, but then each and every one of them would happily admit that they too had a VPN, which means they suffer no such restrictions. “Fewer and fewer people get their information from CCTV [state TV] now,” another Chinese student told me. “Many of my friends don’t even have a TV in their home.” She explained that the control of information wasn’t so much about the things the authorities broadcast, but more what they muted: the name of previous presidents are not searchable on Baidu (China’s answer to Google), for instance, “but most people don’t care about that, they do care a lot when ordinary people are harmed though, and that kind of scandal can’t be suppressed. If my Weibo account got sealed one day, I’d register another the next day and tweet about why censorship is unreasonable.”

This last exchange is from an ongoing email correspondence I have with a couple of Chinese students who have gotten in touch with me over the years because of a book of mine that was published in China. I always ask them about their lives in China, and they patiently explain that, no, they do not have democracy in the Western sense, but that the system they have functions as well as that in the West. After all, as one student put it to me, “It is true that a vote can be a symbol of democracy, partly, but when the result of the vote can be easily shaped by outsiders, can we still say that vote means democracy?” Both systems are influenced by propaganda, he said. They have read the reports in the Western media of the human rights abuses by their government, but, wrote another student, “if there is that much imprisoning, beating and restrictions, how can our government still have such a high level of support?” A poll by the Edelman Trust Barometer, an independent international organization that measures the trust of people in their governments, rates the Chinese people’s trust in their government institutions at over 80 percent, higher than any other country in the world (the UK is at 36 percent, the United States at 33 percent).

Ben and Søren are products of China’s one-child policy, only recently abolished when the country’s leadership belatedly realized it was facing a demographic and gender-balance crisis. Sex-selection abortions are one reason that in some provinces, the ratio of boys to girls is 123 to 100. By 2020 there will be 30 million more men than women aged twenty-four to

forty in China. Another report put it a different way: China is missing more than 60 million females. This is doubly problematic because of China's patrilocal system, in which a bride moves into her husband's family home and then takes care of his parents in their old age. The gender imbalance in the population has also caused an astronomical rise in the cost of a "bride price," as it is known in China. Even in rural areas, the bride price can easily run to \$15,000, and in some cases several times that.

Everyone knows that the Japanese are getting older too, of course. In 2017, for the first time since record keeping in the country began, there were fewer than one million births in Japan. The fertility rate has slumped to 1.43 babies per woman of childbearing age (the "replacement" rate, at which the population remains stable, is 2.07). Abe Shinzo has pledged to raise that to 1.8 by 2025. He had better get started. The statistics are frightening. The population fell by a record 403,000 people (the population of a small city) in 2017; in other words, every day, one thousand more Japanese people die than are born. By 2053 the population is set to fall below 100 million from the current 127 million; by 2065 there will be just 88 million Japanese people, and over-sixty-fives will make up around 38 percent of the population. Among them will be around 7 million people with dementia, with a shortfall of around 1 million care workers to look after them.

That's Japan, but South Korea is in an even worse situation. It has one of the lowest birth rates in the world: in 2017 it reached a record low of 1.05 (in Seoul, the rate was 0.84). Its population is aging faster than any other country's, faster even than Japan's. The decline started in the early 1960s when it was believed that cutting the birth rate was essential to boosting the economy: back then, the birth rate was at 4.5. The government encouraged as many women as possible to go on the pill, and female sterilization programs continued into the 1980s. The result is that by 2026, according to the United Nations, almost a quarter of the population will be over sixty-five. The Korean government has spent billions incentivizing childbirth, including the introduction of universal free childcare.

China's crisis is slightly mitigated by the sheer size of its population, which is projected to peak at 1.5 billion by 2028, but its birth rate is

currently 1.57, and declining. By 2050 over a quarter of the population will be over sixty-five. After the CPC changed the one-child policy into a two-child policy in 2015, the birth rate did rise by almost 8 percent, but fell back by 3.5 percent within a year.¹ And because China's population is beginning to age at a much earlier stage in the development of its economy than Japan's and South Korea's have, it is less likely to have accrued the future funds to cope with its impending gerontological imbalance.

What is causing the population decline in these countries? Whenever any country gets richer, fewer babies are born (Taiwan's birth rate has also declined from 7.04 in 1951 to 1.17 in 2016), but the problem is more visible in East Asia because Japan, South Korea, and China are notoriously averse to immigration. Second, young people in all three countries are living with increasing financial insecurity and fewer career opportunities. The work landscape has changed, becoming far less stable. In Japan, once the spiritual home of jobs-for-life, around 40 percent of the workforce are in temporary or part-time work, while only about a quarter of graduates can expect to secure one of the increasingly elusive, relatively secure posts at the large corporations. This has a clear knock-on effect on the institution of marriage and the prospects for procreation. For many, the idea of one day having a house and a spouse is becoming increasingly remote.

In 2016 Japan's National Institute of Population and Social Security Research published a poll of around fifteen thousand Japanese men and women aged eighteen to thirty-four that showed that nearly 70 percent of unmarried men and 60 percent of unmarried women were not in a relationship, compared to 48.6 percent and 39.5 percent when the survey was first conducted in 1987. Over 40 percent of the total surveyed were virgins, up from 36.2 percent of men and 38.7 percent of women in 2010. Though 90 percent of people said they hoped one day to marry, over a quarter said they had effectively given up on looking for a partner.

It is a similar story in South Korea. "The cost of having children is so high—buying a house, education, and so on," said Cheong Young-rok, the economist at Seoul National University, when I asked him about the reasons for population decline. In the 2012 edition of his book *Korea: The Impossible Country*, Daniel Tudor estimates that the cost of raising a child

in South Korea is equivalent to almost half the country's per capita GDP. The Koreans, and their Japanese peers, also know from bitter experience that their countries' working culture, with its extreme hours and intolerable conditions, is not compatible with being young parents. Many are afraid to take the maternity/paternity leave on offer because they know it will hamper their careers, or even cost them their jobs.

It could also be argued that traditional—some would say “outdated”—values are to blame for this. South Korea has the fewest births out of wedlock among the OECD countries—only 1.9 percent, compared to the OECD average of 39.9 percent. Similarly, part of the explanation for Japan's demographic nightmare might be found in news stories like one from 2018 in which a woman working in a private nursery school in Aichi Prefecture was forced to *apologize* to older colleagues when she became pregnant.

There have been some meaningful and progressive initiatives from the governments of these East Asian tigers. South Korea and Japan now lead the OECD in paid parental leave for fathers—offering fifty-three and fifty-two weeks, respectively, compared to two weeks in the UK and zero in the United States. Even in Sweden, home of the “latte papas,” paid leave for fathers is a mere fourteen weeks. Meanwhile, the Chinese state has launched campaigns encouraging single women over twenty-seven years of age to basically get on with it and find a mate, or risk becoming a “leftover woman,” as they call it. And, erm, November 8 is “Bra Day” in South Korea, when men buy bras for women presumably in the hope of one day removing them.

There is perhaps one bright side to these frightening demographic projections. In theory, they might just prevent these old enemies from going to war in the future. There are five hundred thousand fewer eighteen-year-olds in Japan now than there were twenty years ago. The Japanese military now has 37 percent of personnel over the age of forty (compared to 9 percent in the United States) and is already experiencing a severe shortage of recruits, particularly ones who would be willing to fight. American political scientist Mark Haas has termed this phenomenon “geriatric peace,” the idea being not so much that there won't be enough young people to fight

in armies (technology will probably alleviate that problem), but that governments' priorities will lie elsewhere, with spending on care for the elderly, for instance.

SHANGHAI II

The South Korean comfort women campaigners have been hugely successful in promoting their cause worldwide, to the extent that, I think, in many people's minds, the issue is exclusively a Korean one. They even made it to Broadway recently, with *Comfort Women: A New Musical*, which was revived in 2018 and supported by the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.

I was interested to find out why the Chinese government had not campaigned for their victims with the same vigor as the South Koreans, or memorialized them in the same way they have done the victims of Unit 731 and the Nanjing Massacre. Was there some aspect of the issue that made it tricky for the Chinese leadership to address, or might they be keeping it up their sleeve for the future?

It turns out that there is a small museum dedicated to the Chinese comfort women in Shanghai Normal University. I arrange to meet with its curator, Su Zhiliang, one of the leading researchers into China's wartime sex slaves.

Outside on the lawn in front of the building, in the pleasantly leafy grounds of the university campus, is a bronze statue of two comfort women with yellow woolen scarves around their necks, just like the statues I had seen in Korea, except beside them is an empty seat. The statues represent a

Korean comfort woman and a Chinese comfort woman, Su explains when I meet him upstairs in the university building overlooking the garden. The empty seat represents the other victims of sexual abuse in the world.

“Every single war in world history involved sexual violence toward women,” he tells me. “But it is usually carried out by individual soldiers, so [it is] personal behavior. The difference is, in this case, it is the Japanese government that discovered that using women, Chinese women, as sexual slaves could cheer up their military, so they decided to use women as a tool. This is a war crime.”

Su is in his early sixties. He has an open, unlined face framed by a parabola of thinning, plastered-down hair. During our interview he keeps his coat and scarf on, which adds to his general air of “man on a mission.” He has just returned the previous evening from Seoul where he had been participating in an International Women’s Day parade, and is due to leave any minute for the airport on another campaigning trip.

Su has been researching the Chinese comfort women since the early 1990s. He was studying in Tokyo when a Japanese professor drew his attention to the fact that the first Japanese imperial army brothel was established in Shanghai, his hometown. He was appalled that he didn’t know this, and on a voluntary basis, without any state support, he set about collecting testimonies, artifacts, and documents relating to the Chinese comfort women. “I thought it would be quite a small thing, that there were maybe four or so brothels in Shanghai, but I discovered there had been one hundred seventy. The scale was beyond imagining.”

In addition to his academic research, Su and over a hundred of his students have been involved in welfare projects to help the surviving comfort women, raising and distributing funds, and visiting the women regularly. He believes there were an estimated four hundred thousand comfort women during Japan’s imperial period, perhaps half of them Chinese. He admits that a definitive figure is difficult to determine because of the destruction of records by the retreating Japanese soldiers and the chaos in China after the war, but says that “there are some researchers who believe the figure could have been one million.”

Here, as at the House of Sharing in South Korea, the artifacts on display in the museum are shocking in their mundanity. There are condoms provided to the Japanese soldiers and sourced from veterans in Japan, a jar of potassium permanganate used for disinfectant purposes, and even architectural salvage from a long-demolished Shanghai comfort station. The museum is small, just one room, and includes confessions from Japanese soldiers involved with the setting up and running of the brothels, as well as testimonies from many of the women with whom Su and his researchers have made contact. There are relics from the womens' later lives—the unbearably poignant belongings of elderly women, like combs, mirrors, and porcelain teacups. Su currently has just twenty women on his list of surviving victims, most of whom are in their late eighties or nineties and in precarious health. They have spent much of their lives ostracized by their communities, and live in poverty.

Su agrees that so far, the comfort women issue has had a relatively low profile in China, compared to South Korea. “That’s the nature of Chinese people, to be more soft and to go gently,” he says. “[The comfort women] are kind of neglected here because we have such a massive population and it is just impossible for the government to take care of everyone.”

There are several other reasons why the plight of the Chinese comfort women is less well-known. After the war, with millions starving, migrating, imprisoned, or killed, caring for abused women was not a priority. The subsequent convulsions of the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward further sidelined the history of China’s occupation. Also, many of the women chose to hide their past, committed suicide, or died as a consequence of their ordeals. And when, in 1972, China restored diplomatic relations with Japan in return for massive investment from Tokyo, it formally waived its claims to any further compensation for the war. At that time, it was in everyone’s interests to let the past rest.

In her book *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan’s Sex Slaves* (cowritten with Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei), Peipei Qiu ventures that Confucian attitudes might also be to blame because they “demand that, at all costs, a female remain a virgin until marriage, even if that means risking her life; hence, a survivor of rape was deemed impure

and was regarded as a disgrace to her family.” A 2015 piece about the Chinese comfort women in the *Financial Times* similarly claimed that “their wartime rape [is] shrouded in Confucian delicacy.” But no society is as Confucian as South Korea’s, so this explanation seems odd to me. A historian I spoke to in Hong Kong speculated that the Chinese also felt a kind of shame over not having been able to protect their women, but again, why would they be different from the Koreans in this regard? Others speculate that the Chinese government is wary of encouraging legal activity by civic groups or individuals against the Japanese state because it might lead to Chinese people suing their own government for its many crimes—which range from land seizures to human organ harvesting, imprisonment for political reasons, anything remotely connected to Tibet, the imprisonment for “reprogramming” of as many as half a million Muslim Uighur people in Xinjiang, and so on. Unfortunately, this has echoes of the “Whataboutism” employed by Japanese apologists to attack Chinese researchers into Japanese crimes—as in, “*What about* all the terrible things the Chinese did to themselves?” Su Zhiliang acknowledges this. “We do need to reflect on what we did to ourselves. I’m not only looking at what outsiders did to us. Of course, it is difficult for very huge political reasons. It is also difficult for people to discuss on a personal level,” Su continues. “For example, the victims who are still alive now [in China], one of them she doesn’t want to be mentioned at all, not her name, not her picture, nothing related to her personally, so it is very difficult for us to look at this, and for the media to investigate.”

It shouldn’t be forgotten that the Chinese situation was different from that of the Koreans: the Koreans were colonized, while China was at war with Japan—perhaps this is a factor. One Chinese person I spoke to about his country’s reticence on the issue said the problem was that you could never present the comfort women story as a positive narrative. Other aspects of the war could be manipulated in one way or another to be viewed heroically, but the comfort women story was just all bad. Not an appealing narrative for those Chinese state-television wartime dramas, for instance.

Some Chinese are openly hostile to the subject being researched at all. In the early days of his research, Su Zhiliang received threatening phone

calls from locals asking why he needed to dig around in all these sexual matters. Why not just let it be? He also believes that Korean people are more patriotic, and more single-minded: “Once they set their mind on something, they go for it until the end.”

At the end of our time together, just as I am leaving the museum, I ask Su if any of the buildings that housed the military brothels remain. I am assuming no, and my question is really an afterthought, but it turns out that there are several, including what Su claims is the first ever Japanese military comfort station, dating from 1932. It is at No. 1, Lane 125, East Baoxing Road, a little way north of the old British consulate, he says. It was once the Daiichi Saloon, a former dance hall, and is now currently home to about seventy migrant workers. He shows me recent photographs of the building, including, inside, a wooden frieze featuring Mount Fuji that still decorates the lintel above a doorway. There are hopes to one day turn it into a museum and memorial, he says.

Accompanying me on my visit today to help with translation is Liyan, a documentary filmmaker who lives in Shanghai. She and I look at each other. We are both thinking the same thing. We need to go see this place. We clarify again its exact location, say our goodbyes to Su Zhiliang and his students, and jump in a cab for the ride across the city. After an hour, the taxi drops us off outside a Japanese restaurant.

It takes a few minutes to get our bearings, but there it is, right across the street, the former comfort station: a robust-looking two-story gray-brick building with arched windows, part of a walled compound. We approach it warily, peering into the front courtyard to see—yes—the entrance shown in Su’s old black-and-white photographs; there beneath a scattering of potted plants are the same Art Deco-style, curved, tiled steps. Two elderly women are tending to hundreds of pieces of ginger, which they have laid out to dry in the alleyway beside the building. The women know of the building’s former purpose, they say. “I would never live here alone,” one of them tells Liyan. “But it’s okay to be here surrounded by people.” Another woman, in slippers and a pink overcoat, says she has lived in the building for forty years but doesn’t want to talk anymore about its history.

Before Su left to catch his flight, he had told me that when he started his research, the government “wanted me to stop researching it, it was too sensitive, but I thought it was so important, not only to China, but for the whole world to learn about this. If we don’t reflect on this, if we don’t look at it seriously, will it happen again?”

“I ask you,” he said, stopping as we walked through the museum and turning to me, “if this happened to your grandmother or a woman you know, what would you do?”

HONG KONG I

If you recall, I started this journey on the beach at Kurihara mulling over my grand historical hypothesis that the Americans were the cause of all of East Asia's woes. If Commodore Perry had not insisted that Japan open up, then the Japanese would not have modernized, militarized, marched, and massacred their way across the continent. If the Americans hadn't given the Japanese that traumatic lesson in gunboat diplomacy, the Japanese might never have forced their own unequal treaties upon Korea before annexing it, and then invading Manchuria. The Kwantung Army would not have gone rogue and rampaged as far as Burma and the Philippines. There would have been no US bombing of Japan; perhaps the nationalists would have held China and it would not have turned Communist (that's 20 million lives saved); it is unlikely that the Korean Peninsula would have been split in two by a terrible war, and the Kim dynasty would not have commenced its seven-decade totalitarian reign, culminating in the current nuclear threats. Taiwan would not be mired in its present geopolitical pickle, and America would not have spent the postwar decades supporting brutal dictators there and in South Korea, "deforming postwar Asian affairs" as Herbert Bix, a biographer of Emperor Hirohito, described their meddling.

I could go on—the Vietnam War wouldn't have happened, what would have happened in Russia? and so on—but of course, this kind of

posthistoric blame game is for fools; my hypothesis is absurdly simplistic, hopelessly misguided, downright misleading, and quite, quite wrong on a number of key matters.

No. It is the British who are to blame.

At least, this is now my conclusion, having spent my first day in Hong Kong visiting its history museums, all of which make it very clear that right here, in southeastern China, around two hundred years ago, the British concocted a wicked plan to enslave millions of Chinese through opium addiction, and it was *this*, not the Americans' aggression, that paved the way for the country's Century of Shame.

Actually, I'd been hearing this historical narrative since I visited the National Museum of China back in Beijing a couple of weeks ago. The museum had an entire section dedicated to the Opium Wars of the 1840s and '50s, a dark stain indeed on British history, which, I am newly convinced, is the root cause of all the problems that beset contemporary East Asia.

The Beijing museum likened the British to "a swarm of bees, looting our treasures and killing our people. They forced China's ruling Qing dynasty to sign a series of unequal treaties that granted them economic, political and cultural privileges and sank China gradually into a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society." This is the version of history that the Chinese people learn in their schools, museums, movie theaters, and newspapers and via their televisions: that the British government conspired to deliberately destabilize China through the illegal sale of opium. It is not untrue.

Since the mid-eighteenth century, the British had been buying tea and porcelain from China, despite the fact that the Qing had restricted the trade to a few go-betweens in Canton, in the southeast of the country, and to just a few months of the year. This was the first frustration for the East India Company (EIC) and the motley crew of chancers, thieves, and adventurers who muscled in on the trade when its monopoly was abolished in 1833. The second problem was that Britain's tea addiction was on such a scale that the country ran up a serious trade deficit with China, which at that time had the largest economy in the world, larger than all of Europe combined. The

deficit was exacerbated by the Qing's refusal to accept anything but silver in exchange for their goods and their almost total lack of interest in anything else the British had to sell them. There was, however, one product of the British empire on which the Chinese were rather keen: opium, produced in Bengal. The fact that this wonderful multipurpose drug, which could treat malaria, diarrhea, and insomnia and make you feel *really* good, had been illegal in China since 1729 did not deter the British traders. By the late 1830s, they were exporting forty thousand chests a year, each containing about 140 pounds of opium, through the Hong traders in Canton. It was said to be the most valuable trade in any single commodity in the world, and contributed significantly to the coffers of the British government in India. And with the opium came another pernicious invasion: Christian missionaries, who arrived on the same boats, acted as interpreters for the smugglers, and distributed their literature alongside the drugs.

In 1839, with public disorder growing, both because of the illegal opium trade, the Qing emperor in Beijing named the famously conscientious bureaucrat Lin Zexu as a new commissioner to Canton and dispatched him to the city to give the British a slap on the wrist. That spring, with echoes of the Boston Tea Party, Lin blockaded the British warehouses, confiscated twenty thousand chests of British opium, and destroyed it in lime pits at the fortress at Humen, on the Pearl River Delta. The British withdrew and weighed anchor a little to the south, beside some disease-ridden rocks overlooking a harbor long bedeviled by pirates. The Chinese were feeling pretty triumphant at this point.

In London some called for a military response, but there was also a great deal of opposition to attacking China, including from Conservative opposition leader William Gladstone, who said that he did not know of a conflict "more calculated in its progress to cover this country with permanent disgrace." In response, the British government claimed that the heads of executed British traders had been displayed at the gates of Canton. This was a lie, the nineteenth-century equivalent of fake news, but then foreign secretary Viscount Palmerston was successful in pitching the sending of warships to China as a moral crusade (and is hated to this day by the Chinese). The British would fight on behalf of the civilized Western

world against the arrogant, obstreperous, so-called Celestial Empire and, with still-fresh memories of the humiliation of Lord Macartney, the king's envoy, by Emperor Qianlong back in 1793, the prime minister knew it would play well with his electorate. Forty-five years earlier, the emperor's response to Macartney's gifts of barometers and airguns, an attempt to open China to trade, had been gloriously supercilious: "We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your manufactures." Chinese arrogance had not been forgotten. The British went to war.

The Chinese brought matchlocks to the fight; the British brought flintlocks and the world's first iron warship, the *Nemesis*. The British were aided too by the Qing's almost comically incompetent and corrupt provincial officials. At one point, some local Cantonese forces misconstrued an instruction from their Beijing masters to fire their guns as little as possible, and turned up for a battle with no guns whatsoever (a double shame, as the soldiers in question were notably good shots). On another occasion, troops from a landlocked province became seasick on a mission to reclaim a nearby island. So desperate did things become that as the British sailed up the Yangtze in 1841, the Chinese toyed with the idea of hurling live monkeys with firecrackers strapped to their backs onto their ships. This, from a nation that had been the greatest power in Asia, with a population of 328 million, more than that of the entire British empire. For several months after hostilities had commenced, the emperor didn't even realize he was at war with Britain, or for that matter know where Britain was located. Lin sent a report claiming that the British would easily be defeated because "Their legs and feet are closely bound by their tight trousers, which makes bending and stretching inconvenient." When the British navy arrived and swiftly began to destroy the Chinese defenses, Lin simply invented victories and reported them to Beijing. Thousands of Qing troops were effectively massacred, for the loss of mere tens of British. The British compounded their crimes by stealing twenty thousand tea seedlings, which were eventually used to create the Indian tea industry in Darjeeling, thus ending China's tea monopoly forever.

The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing awarded the British that disease-ridden, pirate-plagued island known as Hong Kong, but in the ensuing years the

British grew dissatisfied once more. In 1856, on the flimsiest of pretexts, they had another go at the Chinese, sailing, together with some French warships, as far as Beijing, where they razed the emperor's summer palace, the "Versailles of China," to the ground, "leaving them a dreary waste of ruined nothings," as one British witness described the aftermath. With the 8th Earl of Elgin, son of the Parthenon marbles felon, overseeing proceedings, they looted countless treasures, including the empress's dog. This was later given to Queen Victoria and renamed "Looty," which sounds like a storyline from *Blackadder* but did actually happen. Items from the summer palace still occasionally pop up in auctions and museums in Europe, such as one of the fabled twelve zodiacal heads from one of the palace's fountains, which was owned by Yves Saint Laurent and put up for auction after his death.¹

The Second Opium War was ended by the Treaties of Tianjin, which forced the Chinese to legalize opium and open up the interior of their country to foreigners for the first time. Today, this is still presented to the Chinese people by their government as the greatest humiliation ever visited upon the country, and that includes the Japanese invasion.

So my new domino theory of historical blame goes like this: If the British East India Company had not been such a bunch of brigands, they would never have attempted to flood China with opium; the Chinese would not have had to enforce their sovereign right to ban the trade; and the Opium Wars would not have taken place and contributed to the fundamental weakening of the ruling Qing dynasty, leaving them vulnerable to internal conflicts, such as the catastrophic Taiping and Boxer Rebellions, and the late-stage, end-of-empire machinations of Empress Dowager Cixi. China then would not have been vulnerable to the external threat of the Japanese in the 1890s, when it was defeated after coming to the defense of Korea, or forced to relinquish Taiwan and other territories to the Japanese.

I want to put my new theory to the test, so I arrange to meet with a local history professor here in Hong Kong. I hope you don't mind, but I'm going to take the liberty of changing her name. She only asked that some of her comments be off the record—mostly regarding the current regime in

Beijing—but to avoid any risk of her being identified at all, I am going to call her Professor Yang.

She and I meet in a trendy coffee bar in Kowloon, a short ride across the harbor from Hong Kong Island on the iconic Star Ferry. I put to her my theory that the British were to blame for everything.

“No, no, no. Blame the Chinese!” replies Professor Yang, placing her coffee on the table and waving her hands dismissively. “Qing China was already in a state of decline. The Opium Wars were only a symptom of that, and everybody took advantage of it. Even the Chinese—they took the chance to kick out their alien rulers and adopted nationalism.”

Professor Yang invited me to consider a few questions: Were the Chinese really so passive? Did they have no free will? Were they really anesthetized by the poppy so easily? Doubtless many Chinese enjoyed a functioning relationship with the drug on a recreational basis and experienced no serious side effects, just like thousands in Britain did at the time (where you could buy opium at the pharmacy). It would have been a very weak country indeed to let a few junkies drag it down. The truth is that the Opium Wars, and the ensuing “Hundred Years of Shame,” were a mess of the Qing’s own making, a result of corruption, incompetence, and distractions elsewhere in what had become an unmanageably vast empire. Yes, the British traders in Asia were unprincipled racists who cloaked their illegal actions in the rhetoric of a “civilizing” power, and the British navy’s campaigns were indeed so one-sided they can be described as massacres (in fact, the Japanese have cited them when defending their own mass killings in China), but there was no grand conspiracy to enslave the Chinese through addiction; the British just spotted and exploited a commercial opportunity.

Professor Yang was keen to emphasize that the Qing themselves were invaders. The emperor at the time of the Opium Wars, Daoguang, was the eighth-generation descendant of Manchu clan rulers, a non-Chinese people who had invaded from the north, ousting the Ming in 1644. Just like the British, and later the Japanese, the Qing had been an expansionist power pushing the country’s borders as far as Tibet and the Uighur empire—doubling its total area. By the late seventeenth century, the Qing had overextended in attempting to move into Burma and Vietnam and were

unable to effectively rule what had become—and remains—less of a country, more of a continent.

The Qing were deeply resented in many parts of their empire, particularly here in the southeast of China, where the British were considered by the Cantonese to be no more “alien” than the rulers from the north. In fact, soon after the Second Opium War, the British were able to form Chinese military units of local Hakka Chinese. As historian Julia Lovell puts it in *The Opium War*, her excellent history of the first Sino-British conflict:

“The situation begs the question of what kind of political and social community Qing China was, that a bloody struggle against foreign invaders should for so many become an unmissable opportunity to fleece the government....”

As we wrap up our coffee meeting, Professor Yang assures me that there was little point in me beating myself up over what my forebears did in her homeland: “Imperialism was a global phenomenon; no one could stop it. Japan had already tried to expand onto the Korean Peninsula in the sixteenth century. You can’t blame air for allowing fire!”

Why am I so preoccupied with events of the nineteenth century? Because history is repeating itself in twenty-first-century China, and the Communist Party of China (CPC) is using nineteenth-century British aggression to justify its domestic and overseas agendas to its people and the outside world. That is why the CPC is so invested in the historical blame game, why every Chinese child is taught that China is on a mission to avenge the Opium Wars. That’s why the section of the National Museum in Beijing dealing with the Opium Wars is said to be Xi Jinping’s favorite part: one of his very first official acts on becoming president was to visit it. That’s why new members of the party are sworn in before the ruins of the summer palace in Beijing. The Opium Wars are a crucial element of the CPC’s propaganda.

Look at it another way. Why did the Qing crumble? Because hubristic expansionism had created a vast and diverse empire that it found impossible to maintain; because they lacked natural resources; and because their maritime power was no match for that of the British. Beijing is facing

precisely the same challenges today, but is determined to have the right answers this time. China has twenty-two provinces and is home to fifty-six different minorities, who, by some estimates, collectively speak three hundred languages or dialects. As Ben Chu puts it in his book *Chinese Whispers*, the country is still “a multi-ethnic empire masquerading as a nation.” It is still lacking in natural resources, and feels threatened by other maritime powers—primarily the United States, but also Japan. The solutions to these age-old problems are, respectively, to control communications with censorship, surveillance, and, if need be, suppression; the economic colonization of parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America to secure the raw materials vital for the Chinese economy; and the creation of the greatest navy in the world. I have no idea whether the men who work the bulldozers and dredgers that are rapidly turning the Spratly Islands into a naval base in the South China Sea sleep beneath stirring “Hundred Years of Shame” posters, but it’s not unthinkable.

The CPC’s use of the Opium Wars as anti-Western propaganda is a relatively recent development. Back in the 1960s, when Chairman Mao was attempting to repair relations with Japan, America, and Europe, if the wars were mentioned at all, blame was more typically placed on the stupidity and cowardice of the Qing rulers, not on the foreign opportunists. After Mao’s death, the modernization of China followed a Western approach, so there was even less of a need to raise the specter of 1842. It was only after the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989 that the leadership in Beijing realized there was capital to be gained by stirring up indignation at the Westerners’ nineteenth-century crimes. The CPC realized that the conflicts, with their toxic blend of the foreign destabilization of Chinese laws and outrageous looting of historic treasures, could be a useful distraction for a population increasingly dissatisfied with the pace of democratic and economic reforms. Parallels could be drawn between the nineteenth century and alleged Western meddling in late-twentieth-century China, the kind of meddling that, the CPC improbably claimed, had inspired the students to protest in central Beijing.

As Wang Zheng, a professor at Seton Hall University in the United States, puts it in *Never Forget National Humiliation*, his survey of Chinese

history textbooks and memorials, “The Communist government’s ideological reeducation of the public ... relentlessly portrays China as the victim of foreign imperialist bullying during ‘one hundred years of humiliation.’” In that snappy way of academics, he calls it “the institutionalization of manipulated historical consciousness.” But the CPC didn’t just use the Opium Wars to distract attention from Tiananmen; it was around this time that anti-Japanese propaganda also began in earnest in China.

“There are some who believe that after Tiananmen Square, the Chinese thought very strategically about how they might make that PR problem go away, so they decided to give the Japanese the biggest PR problem of all time, to drive a wedge between Japan and Korea and the US,” Andrew Salmon, the British historian and journalist I had met in Seoul, had told me when we spoke about the comfort women campaign, which began in South Korea at the same time. “And you know, the more time goes on, the more I’m thinking that maybe there actually is something to it.” (Along with the Western imperialists and the Japanese, Beijing also blamed the Taiwanese for the Tiananmen protests, and as a result, relations with Taipei regressed after 1989.)

And so, in the 1990s, the CPC began to teach the China-as-victim version of events in schools, to encourage on-message TV dramas and movies about the Opium Wars, and to build over four hundred memorials and museums across the country commemorating them. Their propaganda efforts even extended to computer games. Julia Lovell recalls that in 1997, prior to the return of Hong Kong, a Chinese computer game company launched *Opium War*, a game in which players could “use wisdom and courage to exterminate the damned invaders!”

The Chinese’s vengeful resentment about the Opium Wars reminded me a little of the Koreans’ *han* and how that had been harnessed by the Seoul dictatorship in the 1970s to motivate its workers there. But by stoking anti-Western feeling in this way, there is sometimes a risk that public anger might one day turn against the government itself. In promoting the comfort women issue, by drawing attention to one historical crime on Chinese soil the CPC might well lead people to examine other, more recent episodes in

which the guilty parties are a little closer to home. As Lovell writes: “Properly controlled public memory of the Opium War and later acts of imperialism provides a politically correct pressure valve for venting strong feelings in the PRC’s tightly controlled public sphere. Carelessly managed, these same feelings spill out into something dangerously subversive.”

HONG KONG II

Thanks to Professor Yang, I didn't need to feel quite so guilty about my almost pathological infatuation with Hong Kong, which is good, because few places on earth are as magical to me. When I am here, I bristle with excitement, like a dog who's just seen a squirrel, except the feeling is constant. It had the same affect on me the first time I visited, just before the British "handed it" back to the Chinese in 1997. This time, for two days I just walk and look and feel and smell and clamber about the island's snakes-and-ladders hillsides, occasionally hopping onto one of those decadent outdoor escalators, then hopping off to marvel at a creeping banyan tree, or sit for a while in a park listening to the ceaseless birdsong, which makes me feel as if I am in a giant open-air aviary, or breathing deeply the aromas of durian and diesel fumes. The cityscape is spectacular in itself, especially at night, but it's the everyday things that transfix me—the rattan baskets of black garlic left to dry on traffic islands in the middle of the street; open-fronted shops selling dried fish swim bladders and tree fungi the size of dustbin lids; and the raucous dim-sum halls stuffed with pensioners and grumpy waiters in white coats.

As I wander, I feel a strange, painful nostalgia for the years I spent living here in my twenties. Which is odd, as I have never lived in Hong Kong. *The Germans probably have a word for this feeling*, I think, as I gaze

out across the bay, conjuring entirely false memories of glamorous parties on the Peak, trysts with heiresses at the Mandarin Oriental, and high-rolling trips to play baccarat in Macau.

Though there are still English street names and branches of Marks & Spencer, and though you see the Queen's profile on some coins, and the cars have their steering wheels on the right-hand side, I suspect my wistfulness is less about the passing of the colonial era and more a sense of the sheer miraculousness of Hong Kong, the mere fact of its existence—just because a few roguish opium traders somehow saw that this hilly little island might provide shelter—many back in London grouched that all we'd won was “a barren island with hardly a house on it.” It is miraculous too that Hong Kong remained in British hands right up until the end of the hundred-year lease, although for a few years it was of course under Japanese control.

The Japanese attacked Hong Kong within hours of bombing Pearl Harbor. On my second day, I visit the fortress built by the British, high up on the cliffs above the eastern end of the harbor, where the Japanese took control of the island in December 1941. Today, the fort houses the rather excellent Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defense, set up during the British era. Up on the battlements here you can still see the bullet holes from the Japanese attack in 1941.

Though the Japanese had been stationed in nearby Guangzhou since 1938, the British never entertained even the possibility that these weedy-looking little Asian men would attack, let alone defeat the might of the British empire, and the then governor of Hong Kong, Sir Mark Young, twice rejected Japanese demands to surrender before finally capitulating on Christmas Day 1941.

Upon their arrival, the Japanese took around nine thousand prisoners of war, many of whom were sent to labor camps in Japan, and largely employed the same approach they had in Korea: Hong Kong would now become part of Japan. They replaced the Hong Kong dollar with the military yen, began to revise Hong Kong's educational system to present Japan in a positive way, teaching those locals who remained the Japanese language, culture, and etiquette—all to promote their Greater East Asia Co-

Prosperity Sphere project, a Japanese empire by another name. All symbols of Western imperialism were eradicated.

The reality of Japanese occupation was rampant inflation, severe rationing, and outbreaks of cholera and tuberculosis. In 1945, when the Japanese left, Hong Kong was devastated, with 230 shipwrecks cluttering the harbor. It was functioning again within ten months. Strangely, there was little if any residual animosity toward Japan in the years after the war, partly because after the initial invasion, many Chinese left or were removed by the Japanese. The population declined by about 1.8 million, leaving only about half a million by 1945. Also, although Hong Kong was crucial to Japanese operations in three large theaters of the war, it was not much more than a military base, so their rule was rather superficial; a great deal of the day-to-day administration of the enclave was delegated to a puppet regime. By the 1950s Japanese companies were already operating out of bases in the territory, which rapidly returned to being a major international commercial port.

At the end of World War II, the Chinese nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek had petitioned to be given the territory, and up until Yalta, it looked like he would get his way. It was only by the grace of the Americans that the British were allowed back, out of fear that, with the nationalists vulnerable, it might fall into communist hands. On their return, the British used a more progressive approach, allowing the Hong Kong Chinese some say in the governing of the territory. "All these reforms were introduced by a rather young group of British officials, many of whom had grown up here," Professor Yang had told me. "That explains a lot why people in Hong Kong are still rather grateful to the British." And after their 1949 victory in the civil war, the communists didn't press for Hong Kong's return, at least not initially. They realized that as China closed down to the outside world, the international window of trade and communication that the territory provided was of vital importance.

At the history museum on Kowloon, I was stopped in my tracks by a photograph of Margaret Thatcher in her becoiffed pomp, part of an exhibition about the negotiations prior to the return of the territory to China. It was like coming face-to-face with a despised schoolteacher; I literally

shivered. The exhibit offered a telling insight into one of the old bat's many delusions: at the start of negotiations with Deng Xiaoping, Thatcher believed the Chinese might actually leave the colony in British hands. That was never going to happen. Instead, like someone hastily flushing their stash down the toilet as the police arrive, the British tried to democratize Hong Kong in the final years of their occupation by making the Legislative Council semi-democratic, although real power remained in the hands of a small group of conservative businessmen. Deng reassured the locals that his One Country, Two Systems would preserve Hong Kong as it had been, at least until a final merger with the rest of China in 2047. Back then, most observers and locals believed that, by that distant date, China would have moved more in the direction of the Hong Kong model rather than the other way around, and that China's economic reforms would automatically lead to more openness and freedom, but of course the opposite has happened and democracy is slowly being stifled in Hong Kong.

Dai Wenming, the Chinese television journalist I had met in Shanghai, had told me that Hong Kong was experiencing a major identity crisis. "They don't know what their purpose is anymore," she said. "They've lost their USP. They want to be like Singapore, free and international, but Shenzhen [the neighboring city, connecting Hong Kong to mainland China] is outperforming them economically." Many other parts of China were just as international these days, she added, but in Hong Kong, the middle class was being squeezed out of the property market.

The 2014 Umbrella Movement saw thousands of Hong Kong residents demonstrate for greater democracy, in particular that Hong Kong's leader be elected democratically instead of being chosen by Beijing. Many activists were arrested, including several publishers and academics. One Hong Kong pro-democracy activist, Howard Lam Tsz-kin, claimed that he had been kidnapped by mainland agents, who had tortured him using a staple gun. He was charged by Kowloon City Court with "making a false report to a police officer," and in July 2017 the Hong Kong High Court disqualified four elected pro-democracy legislators on spurious grounds.

During my visit, there are elections for the Legislative Council, a body left over from the end of colonial rule, when the British permitted half the

seats to be elected democratically; these days, the Chinese government selects most of the unelected half. Some of the existing members of the council had been disqualified because they had given speeches critical of China, and replacement pro-democracy candidates had been banned from running in their places on other even more spurious grounds. As I wander across the island, I pass several polling stations. They look encouragingly like polling stations back home; there are even canvassers for the pro-democracy parties outside. I ask one of them whether the elections are free and fair. Is there interference from Beijing? “What do you think?” she replies.

The next day, when the votes are counted, the pro-democracy candidates lose two of their possible four seats, resulting in the loss of what little power they had. There was low voter turnout at the elections, indicating a lack of faith in the entire process. Voters were also deluged by sophisticated, large-scale social media campaigns, and according to other rumors, bewildered elderly voters were mobilized to vote for mainland candidates.

One local, a pro-democracy Hong Konger, whom I talk to about this in a café in the Central district mentions other factors: “Beijing has done two things: they have given the pro-Beijing candidates much greater financial support, and they have moved in loads of mainlanders, low-income unskilled workers, to live in West Kowloon, and redrawn the boundaries to ensure that those votes count as much as possible. These are people who have come from poorer areas, but they’ve been given decent accommodation, and they are then asked to vote for the party’s choices.” Things grew even more serious in the months after my visit, with violent mass protests against a controversial extradition law imposed by Beijing.

Tomorrow, I will catch a plane to the final country on my circumnavigation of East Asia: Taiwan. I know that the Taiwanese eye the fate of Hong Kong nervously. Mainland China has been alternately threatening and bribing the Taiwanese to accept its authority and reenter the embrace of the Celestial Kingdom, as Hong Kong has been forced to do. But one Hong Kong local has a message for the Taiwanese: “Being part of China means you will gradually lose something you treasure, your rights,

your ways of life. Just basic things you take for granted in a modern, open society will be lost, starting with Facebook. And those supposed economic benefits of reunification with China? They will never reach the general public, only the elites.”

TAIWAN

THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA

My first task after leaving my bags at my hotel in central Taipei is to pay my disrespects at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, an open-fronted monument, a bit like the Lincoln Memorial, that looms over a large square in the center of the capital. It is all very imposing, with eighty-nine steps (one for every year Chiang lived, from 1887 to 1975) leading up to a hall. As your eyes adjust to the darkness inside, before you, flanked by two Taiwanese flags, you make out a gigantic bronze statue of the man himself, seated, in robes, on a throne. This is the Generalissimo, as he was known in the West, usually with an ever so slightly mocking tone, the chairman of the Kuomintang (KMT) government of the Republic of China from 1928 throughout the war with Japan and the subsequent civil war with the communists; and thereafter president here in Taiwan, to which he fled in 1949 and where he lived until his death. But Chiang was also a murderous military dictator who denied the Taiwanese democracy for decades and oversaw a regime in which thousands were imprisoned without trial, or executed, or who simply disappeared.

A statue to such a man in the middle of the capital of what is now a wealthy, advanced, democratic nation might strike one as strange, but this is Taiwan—things are complicated here.

When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, they officially relinquished all their Chinese territories to Chiang's nationalist government, including Taiwan, which had been a Japanese colony since 1895. There were almost half a million Japanese living here when representatives of the KMT began to arrive in 1946; only 28,000 Japanese were deemed crucial to keeping services going—the rest had to leave, and were allowed to take just two bags of belongings with them back to Japan.

The Taiwanese people had been anticipating the arrival of a brave and noble nationalist army, the one that had held the Japanese at bay for so many years and was still fighting the communists in mainland China, but the men who began to arrive on boats from the mainland at the docks in Taipei in 1946 were a corrupt and raggedy rabble, among them a large criminal element. They proceeded to commandeer property and food supplies, take over private homes, and, in some instances, commit assault, murder, and rape.

“The initial PR was that the KMT were going to bring democracy, get rid of the Japanese occupiers, that the island was returning to the motherland,” explains Jerome Keating, an American teacher and historian whom I met on my first afternoon in Taipei. “But when Chiang Kai-shek's people actually arrived, they started looting the place of all the rice and the steel to support the war effort [against the communists] on the mainland, hence you got the Taiwanese phrase ‘Pigs have replaced dogs.’” The Taiwanese had never in their history experienced a shortage of rice, but they did after the KMT arrived.

The Americans had supported the KMT in their fight against the Japanese for several years and then against the communists, but by 1947 they had grown weary of Chiang's corruption and withdrew, or “lost China,” as Western historians have it—the United States never actually “had” China, but never mind. The nationalists' many years of resistance to the Japanese had allowed the communists to regroup, and they finally triumphed in the civil war, Mao declaring the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. On December 10, 1949, Chiang Kai-shek followed those earlier KMT émigrés, fleeing to Taiwan, where he proceeded to rule

as the leader of the self-declared real, true “Free Chinese” government in exile until his death.

Mao’s forces did attempt to follow Chiang to Taiwan, attacking the Taiwanese Kinmen Islands, which are only a mile or so off the Chinese mainland coast and almost one hundred miles from Taiwan, but the communists were defeated thanks in part to the assistance of Japanese military advisers, among them the last imperial governor of Taiwan, hired by the Generalissimo personally. Chiang was nothing if not pragmatic: his hatred of communism trumped his hatred of his former colonial adversaries. And fortunately for Chiang, the communists had to attend to the Korean War, which broke out in 1950 and saw UN troops threaten to cross the Chinese border. Mao gave up on a full invasion of Taiwan, and the KMT dug in for the long haul. By this point it had dawned on the Americans that Taiwan could be an important base in the resistance against the march of communism in East Asia after all, and they sent the 7th Fleet to protect it.

Back at the memorial, Chiang’s statue smiles a tight smile, mouth closed, a grimace really, as if he knows he is on borrowed time. As I look up at him, the guards suddenly commence their regular change-over routine. This turns out to be one of those Python-esque silly-walk affairs, with exaggerated strutting, knee bends, and abrupt 180-degree heel-turns. It is a courageous performance in a way, teetering on that tightrope between compelling and ridiculous.

Though I find it strange to see a monument to a dictator in a now-democratic country, it is hardly without precedent: Napoleon was guilty of crimes against humanity, yet lies in splendor in Les Invalides, and there are still prominent monuments to Franco in Spain, not least his tomb in the Valle de los Caídos. Revisionism is happening faster in Taiwan, though, as in the last couple of years since the main opposition Democratic People’s Party won both the presidency and the Legislative Yuan (the Taiwanese parliament), the process of “Taiwanization” has continued to slowly push back against decades of KMT-led, mainland Chinese cultural influence. This process has included calls to repurpose the monument. The statue has been vandalized too, and hundreds of other statues of Chiang have been

relocated to a rather surreal park on the outskirts of the city, a kind of dictator's limbo.

A short walk away from the Chiang memorial is a very different monument to his era of rule—the 2-28 Memorial Museum, dedicated to one of his regime's early atrocities, which took place on February 28, 1947. Resentment had been brewing among locals toward the new arrivals, and after KMT agents killed a local woman they had caught in possession of some smuggled cigarettes, there were protests outside the government building. Shots were fired on the crowd, with fatal consequences, and the protests spread. The KMT government—still in mainland China at that stage—sent military reinforcements, who embarked on a brutal crackdown. According to some estimates as many as ten thousand protesters were killed.

The incident heralded the period known as the White Terror, after the color of the helmets worn by the feared military police. Free speech was suppressed and all opposition effectively banned. Some estimates of the number of Taiwanese people who were murdered or “disappeared” during Chiang's reign are as high as one hundred thousand, certainly they were in the tens of thousands, but until the pro-democracy movement achieved the island's first free elections in 1996, discussion of the events of February 1947 remained taboo.

Taiwan's journey to democracy has been circuitous, and occasionally baffling to outsiders. As with the first properly democratic presidential elections in South Korea in 1987 that saw the Koreans elect Roh Tae-woo, a former general who had been involved in suppressing the pro-democracy movement in the early 1980s, the moment the Taiwanese got the chance to choose their president in 1996 they also appear to have been struck by a kind of political Stockholm syndrome and promptly elected a KMT candidate, Lee Teng-hui, who had been handpicked for the role by Chiang's son Chiang Ching-kuo, who had succeeded his father as president in 1978, three years after Chiang Kai-shek's death. The opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) did eventually win a general election in 2000, but the KMT still maintained control of the Legislative Yuan, and won the presidency back in 2008. It is only since the DPP's Tsai Ing-wen won the

presidential election in 2016 that the opposition party has held the presidency and a majority in parliament, which is why it is only now that Taiwan is taking steps toward a “transitional justice movement,” the equivalent of South Africa’s truth and reconciliation process.

Complicating matters is the fact that there are many who still view Chiang as a great man, the savior of Taiwan. As Park Chung-hee did in South Korea, Chiang Kai-shek oversaw a rapid industrialization and an ensuing economic miracle in Taiwan through a government-led focus on specific manufacturing sectors. In some respects, Taiwan’s economic miracle was even more miraculous than that of its fellow Asian tiger, with growth averaging almost 9 percent here for thirty years, and its wealth consistently outstripping China’s in per-capita and real terms. Taiwan has now been a top-fifteen global economy for over twenty years, all the more remarkable given that, like Korea, it has virtually no natural resources and two-thirds of it are mountainous. And, as in South Korea with President Park, Taiwan’s economic success persuaded many Taiwanese to turn a blind eye to Chiang’s crimes. One young Taiwanese woman I talked to told me she and her mother had often argued about their former ruler. Her mother defended him, called him a hero even, and claimed that the Taiwanese had much to thank him for. “But what about the people he murdered?” the daughter would ask. “They deserved it. They were attacking him, it had to be done, it was necessary,” said her mother.

Mike Liu, a history professor at Academia Sinica, one of the leading educational institutions here in Taipei, is involved in a new research project to discover what happened during the White Terror era. “People don’t deny that thousands were killed by the regime—even my family knows some of the victims,” he told me. “But for many people, Chiang Kai-shek is some kind of father figure because he saved them from communism.” Even opponents of the KMT give the party credit for the land reforms it imposed early on in its reign. Having learned from their mistakes in China, in Taiwan the nationalists made sure compensation was paid to people who had had land taken, and the process took place in an orderly fashion. No one lost more than 60 percent of their holdings, and often the compensation was reinvested in starting new companies, which boosted the postwar

economy, or it was paid in the form of shares in the Japanese companies that the KMT nationalized, such as the Taiwan Sugar Corporation.

“Yes, the KMT were evil in some respects,” Steve Crook, a teacher and journalist who is a long-term British resident of the southern city of Tainan, told me when I visited the city a few days later. “But they had some achievements. They were one of the few regimes in history to suffer a catastrophic defeat and get a second chance.”

On the negative side, the KMT also helped to foster one of the most all-pervasive cultures of organized crime in the world. “One of the things about Taiwan that always blows my mind is that for everything that’s formal and legal, there’s a gray-market equivalent,” long-term resident Michael Turton, an American, told me. “There are banks, and there are underground banks. There are legal factories and illegal factories. There is a legal lottery, and there is a black-market lottery. There is this whole shadow world.”

During the KMT era, criminal gangs were used to maintain social control, and to do some of the dirtier work of the dictatorship—the disappearances and beatings. Goons would attack pro-democracy protests. Today, the gangs’ influence ranges from construction to logging, private education (not quite as big as in South Korea, but still significant) and, Turton tells me, also many claw machines. What? Those fraudulent grabbing things in amusement arcades? “Yes, they are a good way to launder money. You see them all over Taiwan, but no one ever uses them,” he explained. “Everyone, somehow, is intertwined with a gangster business. We all do business with them, but most of us don’t know when we’re doing it.”

It is impossible to avoid coming into contact with organized crime in Taiwan, even when you vote, or rather, especially when you vote. According to the book *Taiwan: Nation-State or Province?* by John F. Cooper, 15 to 20 percent of local councilors are criminals. Turton, who is a prominent blogger on Taiwanese matters, told me of one city the mayor of which wanted to turn into the artisan coffee center of the country, so he offered tax breaks for coffee shops. The result? The gangsters moved into the posh coffee business to take advantage of the tax breaks. In the 1980s, in another city, the entire council was populated by underworld figures from

various gangs. A former prominent KMT legislator was a gang boss, and I am told he remains the spiritual head of all gangs in Taiwan. “In Taiwan, they treat [organized crime] as if it is another life option,” says Turton. ““Oh, you can take the black path...””

Another local, who preferred to remain anonymous for reasons that will become apparent, told me: “In my wife’s family, there is a cousin and an uncle, and they are running three illegal gambling places. Everybody knows it. They are loaded with money. The rest of the family is very respectable—doctors, teachers...” The two groups—legitimate and illegitimate—meet regularly at family gatherings, she said. When I asked if any politicians ever run for election on a “clean up the gangs” platform, she had laughed. No one would dare, she said. They would be killed. Besides, almost all political factions are connected to organized crime in one way or another. In May 2018 some 310 gang members were arrested because they were suspected of attempting to interfere in local elections, for instance. One political party, the China Unification Promotion Party, was even founded by a former gang leader, Chang An-lo, the so-called White Wolf, who had served a ten-year prison stretch in the United States for drug trafficking.

At the center of the gang culture in Taiwan are the temples. Taiwan’s temples were the preserve of the elite, the intellectuals and academics, because they were connected to the education system. When the Japanese left, the KMT purged a great many from this class, leaving a vacuum in the temples. Into that vacuum stepped the gangs. These days, Taiwanese temples are the political, social, and illicit business nexus of their communities. If you want to know who the prominent local gangsters and businessmen are, you go down to your local temple and read the association names on the notice board. The temples are conduits for vast sums of money, donations, and favors—Taiwan’s equivalent of Masonic lodges or the country clubs. Their big annual get-together is the Mazu, the largest religious procession in the world, which lasts for eight days. Over a quarter of a million people take part, and according to my anonymous source, a good portion of the money raised ends up in dubious pockets.

The most famous Taiwanese gang is the Bamboo Union, possibly the largest criminal gang in the world with an estimated membership of ten

thousand. Based on the Chinese triad organized crime syndicate model, it emerged in Taipei in the 1950s when a KMT-linked group of young teens formed in opposition to local gangs. It thrives to this day on the usual mix of extortion, protection, illegal gambling, and prostitution, as well as online fraud, and has trading links to North Korea.

The accepted existence of a semi-legitimate criminal subculture in Taiwan reminded me of the yakuza in Japan, with which the Bamboo Union have fraternal links. Actually, a lot of Taiwan reminded me of Japan, from the electronic toilets to the scrupulously clean and efficient public transport, and as in Japan there are no overweight people (not even a sumo). There are differences here though: couples hold hands in public, and even kiss, which you almost never see in Japan. The Taiwanese also chew betel nut, so the sidewalks are decorated with reddish-brown splats. Taiwan is cheaper than Japan too: dining out is perhaps half as expensive, and you can cross the capital on public transport for less than a couple of dollars. It also smells different—often of mothballs, presumably because the insects here are truly epic, but you also occasionally come across the singular odor of stinky tofu. Walking through Taipei's night markets, those dense and steamy corridors of greedy humanity would occasionally be enlivened by a leaping wok flame but also by an encounter with a cloud of fermented tofu fumes, invariably prompting a brief involuntary increase in pace.

Stinky tofu is just one facet of what is a diverse and underrated food culture that combines Fujianese, Shanghai, and other regional Chinese foods, along with Japanese cuisine every bit as good as you get in Japan, and even some European touches dating from the seventeenth-century arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch on their shores. One of the most appealing aspects of eating in Taiwan is that the Taiwanese are not as bound to tradition as the Japanese, but they still take matters of the table very, very seriously, reverently even, as I discovered when I visited the National Palace Museum.

When Chiang Kai-shek limped across the Taiwan Strait from China, he also brought with him the Qing's gold reserves and a trove of treasures. The latter, originally part of the imperial collection, had been packed into nineteen thousand crates and spirited away from Beijing when the Japanese

invaded in 1937. Nearly three thousand crates were eventually brought to Taiwan by the nationalists “for safekeeping” and, today, their contents are on display at the National Palace Museum, in the foothills to the north of Taipei.

The museum skirts over its larcenous origins; the pieces were “inherited from the Qing imperial court and passed through many places before being moved to Taiwan,” I learn from the guidebook when I visit on my third day in Taipei. The sheer volume of Song ware and Ming vases on display is astounding, but at the very heart of the museum, displayed in individual, alarmed glass cases, in their own dedicated room to which people queue for *ages* to gain access, are the national collection’s two most highly prized pieces, presumably the most prized pieces of art in all of Taiwan, and by extension—I decide to believe—in all of China.

They are not vases, or silk wall hangings, terra-cotta soldiers or jewelry. These are pieces quite unlike any I have seen in such a high-profile location in such a prestigious museum. One of the pieces is a lump, not much bigger than a baseball, of naturally occurring stone called “banded jasper,” mounted in an ornate gold stand. It dates from the Ming dynasty and, thanks to its different-colored strata, looks precisely like a hunk of pork that has been braised in soy sauce. It is labeled “Meat-shaped stone,” and is so appetizing that you could easily imagine sticking it in a steamed *bao*, sprinkling over some peanuts, cilantro, and onion, and stuffing it in your face. The other piece, of the Qing era, and the symbol of the museum appearing on all the promotional posters, is a beautiful bok choy carved out of jade. Look closely and you can see a locust clinging to its leaves. The two pieces would work pretty well together on a plate.

Given their origins, it is not surprising that the ownership of the museum’s treasures is highly disputed. As it has for the artifacts looted from Beijing’s summer palace by the British and French, China has lobbied for years for its cultural heritage to be returned by the Taipei museum (I hope their security is up to scratch).

This has led some cheeky Taiwanese independence campaigners to make the Chinese an offer: Taiwan will return the lot, braised pork stone

included. In return, they ask for just one thing: that Beijing simply acknowledges Taiwan to be an independent state.

CHINESE TAIPEI

“People in my father-in-law’s generation, now in their eighties or nineties, served in the Japanese army. He cries when he sings the Japanese anthem, even today. In his heart he thinks of himself as Japanese.”

On my first evening in Taipei, I have dinner with Michael Turton, an American expat who has lived in Taiwan for over twenty years. He is telling me about his Taiwanese father-in-law, but he says this attitude is not uncommon: most Taiwanese think fondly of the Japanese. The only real difference between the generations is the *intensity* of the fondness for Taiwan’s former colonial rulers. Turton teaches English at a university in northern Taiwan. His students “idolize” Japan, he says. “To them, Japan is all the things Taiwan could be.”

I had been hearing rumors of this Taiwanese love for Japan from Chinese people and from South Koreans throughout my journey. Japanese people were especially keen that I visit the country. I was curious to find out why the Taiwanese colonial experience was so different from that of the Koreans or, for that matter, any of the other countries Japan invaded in the first half of the twentieth century. Following the Fukushima disaster in Japan, for instance, the Taiwanese sent more money than any other country to help the recovery. So yes, I’ll admit it: I’ve come to Taiwan in search of a

positive end to my journey in terms of Japan's relationships with its neighbors.

There is a suggestion that Japan didn't actually want Taiwan, or at least came to regret accepting it as part of the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, after their unexpected victory over Qing China in the first Sino-Japanese War. For a while, it looked like the taking of Taiwan had been an early learner's mistake by a wannabe colonial power. The Qing secretly congratulated themselves on palming the Japanese off with Formosa, as Taiwan was called by the Portuguese. They considered it a land of pirates, headhunters, and really very spiteful insects, "not a place for humans" as Yu Yonghe, a Qing explorer, famously put it. An earlier emperor had described it as "a mud ball in the sea." As for the Taiwanese, they were at a loss as to what exactly they had to do with a war that had taken place a thousand miles away, and many resisted the occupation, at least initially.

Slowly, the Japanese prevailed, though not without violence. Their tactic was to divide and rule Taiwan's numerous indigenous tribes. In the Wushe Incident of 1930, for instance, hundreds of Seediq tribesmen attacked a Japanese sporting event in protest of the loss of their land and the enslavement of members of their tribe. The Japanese retaliated by offering bounties to other tribes, who killed over two hundred Seediq in a two-month campaign. In one museum I see a grisly photograph of the bounty hunters, posing with a Japanese military official in front of a small field of heads.

Taiwan would come to mean many things to the Japanese. It was somewhere to settle their growing population—thousands were encouraged to move there to cultivate the land. It was a source of food, timber, and other materials that were increasingly important to Japan, as their conflicts multiplied. It was of huge strategic importance during Japan's Southeast Asia campaigns and the Pacific War. It supplied manpower for the military, and for mining and other industries back home. And it was a showcase for Japanese colonialism. The Japanese do seem to have genuinely wanted to make Taiwan a model colony. Quite a few Taiwanese I spoke to mentioned the sewage systems built by the Japanese (overseen by a Scottish engineer, William Burton), for instance. The Japanese also electrified the island, and

built roads and railways, schools, and banks. As in Korea, agricultural output improved exponentially under Japanese rule, and over the fifty years they were there, the population grew from 2.6 million to 6.6 million. The Taiwanese were encouraged to learn Japanese, worship at Shinto shrines, and take Japanese names, but this doesn't seem to have rubbed them the wrong way, as it did the Koreans, probably because Taiwan had no real cohesive identity prior to 1895: it was not a sovereign country with centuries of homogenous culture as Korea had been.

Eventually, over two generations, many Taiwanese would come to think of Japan as the motherland, the font of all knowledge and authority. It would become the goal of the elite to send their sons to Tokyo to study, and over two hundred thousand Taiwanese served in the Japanese imperial military, thirty thousand losing their lives.

In January 1945, Kuo Chen-tsun, age twenty and having just graduated from agricultural school, was one of the young Taiwanese men conscripted into the Japanese army. He joined more than willingly—indeed, proudly. “It was my duty to serve Japan,” Mr. Kuo tells me. He had been raised during the Japanese occupation, had had a Japanese education, and still speaks fluent Japanese. “It felt very natural to me to serve in the Japanese imperial army,” Mr. Kuo says, via a translator, “because at that time, through my education, my background, social contacts, I was already Japanese in my thinking, in my mind.”

Call-up papers in hand, Mr. Kuo went by train to Fongshan in southern Taiwan to join approximately one thousand new recruits for three months of training. He was selected for officer training, the first of his family to take this route, something of which he remains proud.

Mr. Kuo, now ninety-three, walks with a stick but is straight-backed and sturdy-looking, with a thick head of hair. Today, he is wearing large, dark glasses, a brown shirt, and gray slacks. We have met at the National Human Rights Museum, housed in what from 1968 to 1987 was the Jing-Mei Military Law Detention Center of the Taiwan Garrison Command. This is where anyone who dared to speak out against Chiang Kai-shek's postwar dictatorship was tried, sentenced, and imprisoned without any recourse to justice.

During the war, many Taiwanese fought with the Japanese imperial army against the Chinese on the mainland, but it was Mr. Kuo's destiny to be posted to fight in East Timor with the 47th Regiment. He never made it there, because the Americans dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and ended the war before his ship sailed. He did not hear the famous statement of surrender from Emperor Hirohito, but when he was informed of it by his superior officer, he remembers being "very disappointed that the Japanese empire had lost, that we the Taiwanese had lost, as we were Japanese subjects." He realizes that many of his compatriots did not return from the war, but was disappointed not to have had the chance to use his training. He is not a member of any veterans' groups, but points out that the Taiwanese still build memorials to the Japanese engineers who helped modernize their country.¹

"You have to understand that the way in which the Japanese ruled Taiwan was totally different from the European powers colonizing Asia," says Mr. Kuo. "The Japanese built up the country, built up its economy." All the most beautiful buildings in Taipei today are Japanese, he says. The bridges they built could cope with typhoons; the ones built later under the KMT regime have fallen down. And while Japanese colonial rule grew harsher in Korea, particularly in the 1930s, the Japanese continued to treat the Taiwanese relatively well. The feeling was that the Taiwanese were not so much colonial subjects as partners in a joint modernization project, on a mission to repel the Western colonial powers. "The Japanese actually *wanted* the Taiwanese to become their citizens. And in terms of Asia at the time, the Japanese were the most advanced yellow race."

Journalist Jason Pan, who had put me in touch with Mr. Kuo and is kindly helping with translation today, winces at this. "The 'yellow race'—this is an old term," he interjects, apologetically. Clearly, though, this was how many felt at the time.

"The Japanese did a lot of savage things and killed innocent people, but they were fighting a war," says Mr. Kuo, who questions the veracity of many of the tales of savagery. The Americans used these stories for wartime propaganda purposes, he suggests, and the Chinese have since embellished them. If you read the Japanese accounts, they entered Nanjing without

much trouble. And the atomic bombs were worse than anything the Japanese did, because they killed civilians indiscriminately. “There were even unborn babies killed. And that is against military law,” says Mr. Kuo.

I ask about his feelings toward the Japanese emperor at the time. “He was not really a god, but a unifying force, at the center. Not an absolute authority.” It is a misunderstanding that soldiers in the imperial army were trained to die rather than surrender, he says. “What we were taught was, don’t die needlessly. Of course we were ready to die, but our instructions were to stay alive and try to escape.”

It is clear that Mr. Kuo still has a sense of loyalty and love for Japan. He feels very differently about the mainland Chinese. The KMT looted property, raped Taiwanese women, and destroyed the intellectual class, he says. They wanted to impose fear on the island and make a statement: “‘We are the new master.’ They forcibly occupied everywhere, took away people’s houses.” Mr. Kuo blames the Americans: “If the Americans had supported the Taiwanese people, we would have become an independent country.” The KMT particularly resented the Taiwanese who had collaborated with and fought alongside the Japanese. (“They came over to Taiwan and saw all these people wearing kimonos and singing Japanese songs,” as Steve Crook put it to me.) To the KMT, the Taiwanese elite were nothing less than traitors.

After the war, Mr. Kuo went to work at a sugar refinery, but in 1953 the White Helmets—the military police—came for him. He was arrested on what he says were trumped-up charges of advocating for Taiwanese independence. He says he merely had a “Taiwanese mentality,” which the KMT saw as provocation in itself. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

In prison, Mr. Kuo shared a cell with twenty-five other men, sleeping two per tatami mat. During the early stages of his incarceration he was beaten with wooden clubs and tortured. At one point, when his captors were trying to get him to sign a confession, they put him in a sack and submerged him in a river until he nearly drowned. On another occasion, they stripped him naked, covered him with sugar water, and left him out in a field tied to a chair for insects to attack. In Taiwan this is a fate worse than death. He remained in prison until 1975, when Chiang’s death prompted an amnesty

of political prisoners, but he has never been officially pardoned for his alleged crimes, nor has he received any kind of apology.

What kept him going for those twenty-one years? “I wanted to outlive Chiang Kai-shek,” he says, grimly. “I loved life. I must keep my life. I must survive in a dignified way.” His strategy was to forget time, to train himself to ignore the passing of hours, days, months. “I wanted to be a witness to history. When I was released, I felt like I was the victor. I had won over this regime.”

Mr. Kuo is beginning to tire. For my last question, I ask about the Chiang Kai-shek memorial. He would be happy to press the button to blow it up, he says. “Put the rubble in the road and let the cars run over it.”

After I have returned home, I receive an email from Jason Pan. He says following a fall at home Mr. Kuo slipped into a coma, and after a month in the hospital on life support, he died. With him has gone another precious testimony to Taiwan’s troubled past.

FREE CHINA

Taiwan is lush and green and warm. Visiting in spring, I had inadvertently hit its sweet spot, weather-wise. The north is subtropical, but the south is fully tropical. From May to September the typhoons and humidity are by all accounts brutal; I'm told in midwinter, the humidity renders the place ferociously cold, but right now, stepping outside feels like slipping into a warm bath.

Taipei combines the sophistication and modernity of Tokyo with the easy charms of a Southeast Asian city, and considering it is the capital of a country of 23 million, it is eerily quiet. Where is everyone? Even in rush hour there are seats on the metro. I never see a traffic jam. There is space to breathe, a laid-back feeling, and the Taiwanese are the friendliest and most helpful people I have met on my travels. "They are very tolerant" is how one local described the Taiwanese to me. "Sometimes a little shy, and they can be worried about losing face." "My main criticism of the Taiwanese is that they only care about money," said another. "But the wonderful thing about the Taiwanese is they only care about money."

These days, as well as being rich, Taiwan is a beacon for democracy, freedom, and progressive social policies in Asia, even more so than Japan. It was the first country in the region to legalize gay marriage (in May 2019) and has by far the best record on gender equality, one example being that 38

percent of the members of its legislature are women (in Japan the figure is around 10 percent). *The New York Times* recently called Taiwan “Asia’s Bastion of Free Speech” and one of the continent’s “most vibrant democracies,” replacing Hong Kong in that role as Beijing tightens the noose there. It has the best press freedom on the continent too, according to an annual survey by Reporters Without Borders: still not that great at 42nd in the world, but South Korea is at 43rd and Japan a rather woeful 67th. China is 176th. Taiwan has decent income equality compared to China, although Japan and South Korea are among the best-performing countries in the world in this regard, and it has one of the most highly educated populations, placing sixth in PISA’s most recent international league table of fifteen-year-olds’ math, science, and reading abilities (Japan was third, South Korea ninth, China tenth).

The population of Taiwan is less homogenous than that of South Korea and Japan. The island’s human history starts with the Austronesian tribes that migrated to Taiwan perhaps a thousand years ago from western Asia, and whose ancestors are found from Sri Lanka in the west to as far south and east as New Zealand (although they are not related to Australian Aborigines). Today, about 2 percent of the population is officially indigenous.

Before Chiang Kai-shek and his 2.2 million nationalists fled to/invasion Taiwan after World War II, two main groups of mainland Chinese had already migrated there. One was the Hakka, an outcast people who originally moved down from northern China to the south around 1,500 years ago and later started coming to Taiwan, culminating in a major migration in the 1860s after the Taiping Rebellion (which had been led by a Hakka). Around the same time, the Fujianese, or Hoklo, came over from the Chinese province just across the Taiwan Strait. The Hakka have a reputation as hard workers, but they were always outnumbered, so they traditionally farmed land others didn’t want, often hilly areas where they had to clear woodland. The Hoklo more typically farmed rice on the lowland plains. The two cultures were, and remain, very different and have often been in conflict with each other.

Today, 15 percent of the population identifies as Hakka and 70 percent as Hoklo; with the 2 percent who are indigenous, that leaves 13 percent as Chinese mainlanders, originating from several provinces, who came here with Chiang Kai-shek in the late 1940s, plus other immigrants. Intermarriage and immigration are muddying the ethnic waters, and these days Taiwanese might choose to emphasize their Taiwanese-ness, their Chinese heritage, their indigenous background, or something else, but in a 2016 poll, more than 80 percent considered themselves Taiwanese first and foremost, ten times the percentage who identified as Chinese. This complex ethnic mix has obvious implications both in terms of domestic politics and, crucially, relations with China. Let's take domestic politics first.

The current government is headed by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), liberals inclined toward Taiwanese independence, who were only finally permitted to campaign openly in the late 1980s. The other main party is still the Kuomintang (KMT), the nationalist party founded in China by Sun Yat-sen in 1911.

"Unfortunately, the KMT still hold a lot of power in the judiciary, and a lot of their power is connected to organized crime and gangs," journalist Jason Pan told me. For many years the KMT was generally held to be the richest political party in the world, worth more than two billion dollars, and the owner of various commercial enterprises, particularly within the media in Taiwan. "They are still funded by China; they want to destabilize Taiwan," Pan says.

The KMT has tended to enjoy solid support from those who identify as mainlanders, but also from many Hakka and indigenous Taiwanese. It is still seen as the party of economic prosperity, thanks to its positive relations and business ties with China. But public-sector workers, including many teachers, also tend to vote KMT. Teaching is a high-status job in Taiwan, and to qualify, you need to do well academically, which means you need to attend the better schools in wealthier areas in city centers. These schools have traditionally been KMT territory and have taught the KMT version of history.

Whenever I expressed incredulity that the KMT was still popular in Taiwan, people would mention Jason Hsu. They spoke of him as the new

progressive face of an increasingly moribund, ideologically worn-out party. Hsu had, for example, been a strong supporter of amending the civil code to allow same-sex marriage, for which some in the party had called for his expulsion.

I arrange to meet Hsu at his office in the center of Taipei, close to the parliament building, where I wait on a too-low sofa facing a wall covered with thank-you letters in a corner of a suite of rooms cluttered with boxes and young volunteers. After a while, Hsu sweeps out of his corner office to greet me. He has recently turned forty, is handsome in a cherubic kind of way, and today is dressed in the uniform of the modern centrist politician: dark two-button suit and hipsterish heavy-framed black glasses. First of all, I wanted to know, why the KMT?

“I was invited to become a youth advisor to the KMT when it was sliding and facing the loss of the 2016 election,” Hsu says. “The KMT wanted someone new, fresh blood, not the traditional pedigree. I figured a party like the KMT, in transition, might be a better space for a person like me to innovate and stir things up a little bit.” Hsu grew up in the southern city of Kaohsiung. His parents, who have a Fujianese background—in other words, pre-KMT Taiwanese—worked in the night market there, and his mother also ran a beauty parlor—“basically the bottom layer of society,” as he puts it. Hsu is particularly concerned that the Taiwanese economy isn’t modernizing fast enough: China has undercut its cheap manufacturing sector and is now muscling in on Taiwan’s high-tech industries. If it loses the advantage in that area, what does Taiwan have to offer the Chinese, or the rest of the world?

Hsu believes that Taiwan’s relationship with China has fundamentally changed. For decades, the KMT was the conduit for China-Taiwan relations, but as the KMT’s popularity began to decline, the Communist Party of China started to bypass them and communicate directly with the Taiwanese people. In early 2018 China’s Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing announced thirty-one “preferential policies” for Taiwanese people, for instance. In essence these were bribes to lure the Taiwanese to work or invest in the mainland on the same terms as Chinese people, for Taiwanese academics to apply for grants to work in China, and so on. Some saw this as

a pernicious capital and human-resources grab, a kind of stealth integration, but it is working: over three million Taiwanese now live in Shanghai. “Taiwan is suffering from a very serious brain-drain to China—in industries, academia, and the education sector,” Hsu says. Others, like Chang Chih-yun, the Taiwanese historian I’d met in Shanghai, thought it was a smart strategy, “shining the sun on Taiwan,” as he put it to me.

And just as the Russians have meddled with the democratic processes in the United States and in Europe, the Chinese government is using social media to deepen the divide between those in favor of Taiwanese independence and pro-China/unification groups. Combined with Beijing’s ongoing pressure on the international community to ignore Taiwan, it often appears as if the Chinese are trying to squeeze the life out of this highly globalized little island of freedom and democracy. Hobbling the economy provides further evidence for those who say the ruling DPP is weak on economic policy and thus boost the chances of the pro-China KMT returning to power. The strategy is already working: the DPP were routed by the KMT in the November 2018 local elections, a result seen as ominous for President Tsai Ing-wen’s reelection chances in 2020.

It seems paradoxical that Beijing is working so hard to support the KMT, because when Chiang Kai-shek led his followers to Taiwan in the late 1940s, he still held out hope of one day recapturing China from the communists and maintained this far-fetched fantasy as official policy for decades, his party only formally ending its state of war with China in 1991, long after his death. In schools, children were taught to believe that it was Taiwan’s role to one day civilize China, like a flea convinced of its sovereignty over the dog to whose back it clings. I don’t think anyone these days believes that Taipei will ever rule China, or indeed would wish to, but China remains adamant that Taiwan is its twenty-third province. These days the CPC sees its old enemy the KMT as its best hope of unification, except, of course, now it would very much be on Beijing’s terms.

A few weeks earlier, in a speech to the Communist Party Congress, Xi Jinping had reiterated his commitment to the “peaceful unification of the motherland” and warned that anyone opposing this would meet “the punishment of history.” In his New Year’s speech in 2019, Xi repeated his

aim to take back Taiwan, calling the island's current stance "an adverse current from history and a dead end." But what do the Chinese people think about all this? From what I hear, there is some doubt about how many Chinese people support Xi in his determination to reunify the two countries, or care either way. For one thing, the Taiwanese as a people are not greatly loved in China. "Young people don't think of the Taiwanese as brothers and sisters anymore," one of my Chinese student correspondents told me. "For us, Taiwanese are more like arrogant and malicious relatives. We support unification, because if it is not reunified, Taiwan is a pain in the ass." She invited me to imagine Taiwan as a giant, unsinkable American aircraft carrier, permanently moored just off the coast of China. Perhaps, as with the peoples of North and South Korea, so much time has passed that the Taiwanese and the Chinese no longer actually have that much in common.

But still Beijing continues to apply pressure in all areas, in all parts of the globe. If a country wants diplomatic ties with China, with all that entails in terms of infrastructure investment, trade, and brown envelope payments, then it must cut ties with Taiwan. Burkina Faso and Panama withdrew their support in 2018, reducing the number of countries that formally recognize Taiwan to just nineteen—places like the Vatican, the Marshall Islands, and Palau, the latter recently appealed to America and Japan for help as Beijing had cut off tourism in an attempt to break its pro-Taiwanese resolve (no small matter: Chinese tourists accounted for almost half of all visitors to the Pacific island). According to the *Asia Times*, "astronomical sums" change hands to maintain these stalwart supporters of Taiwanese independence.

The Taiwanese must also tiptoe through a semantic-diplomatic minefield regarding what they may call their own country. When Taiwanese author Wu Ming-yi's novel about twentieth-century Taiwan, *The Stolen Bicycle*, was nominated for the International Booker Prize, he protested when his country of birth was changed from "Taiwan" to "Taiwan, China" on the organizer's website, following an official complaint from the Chinese embassy in London. There was speculation that the decision was connected with the fact that the prize's sponsor at the time, the Man Group, had recently launched a hedge fund in China.

Beijing has also successfully pressurized forty-four foreign airlines, including British Airlines and Japan's two largest carriers, ANA and JAL, along with other companies such as the Spanish clothing retailer Zara, to stop using the territorial designator "Taiwan" in their online drop-down menus and use "China Taiwan" instead. The Marriott hotels website was shut down entirely in China for the crime of referring simply to "Taiwan," as well as for listing "Hong Kong" and "Tibet" as separate countries. Presumably, somewhere in a windowless building in Beijing, there is a team of people scouring the internet, alert to the grave threat of clothing companies undermining the One China policy.

In 1945 Taiwan was one of the founding members of the United Nations, but it lost its seat to China in 1971 following Richard Nixon's rapprochement with Beijing, and US forces left the island shortly after. Today it is listed by the United Nations under "Other Territories," along with entities like the Palestinian Authority and Northern Cyprus, which are hardly comparable to a thriving, peaceful democracy of 23.5 million people. Taiwan does not even have formal relations with its greatest regional ally, Japan; they make do with fudgy-titled organizations called things like the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association. And at the Olympics Taiwan must compete as "Chinese Taipei."

"China has always done this carrot-and-stick charm offensive," says Jerome Keating, citing as evidence of the latter the test-firing of missiles in Taiwan's direction, which it tends to do just prior to democratic elections. "They say, 'If you declare independence, then we will attack,' but that will never win over the minds of the Taiwanese because they have lived with democracy now and they know China. They don't need China economically either." If anything, it is the other way around: China has benefited hugely from Taiwanese investment and know-how over the last couple of decades, and Taiwan remains its largest source of external investment. One Taiwanese-owned company, Foxconn, is the world's largest electronics manufacturer and employs more than a quarter of a million people in Shenzhen, China (although that figure fluctuates, given the factory's reputation for worker suicides). Neither carrot nor stick are working, though, even among KMT supporters. In the last election, when a strongly

pro-unification candidate came forward, she was sidelined because the KMT leadership knew full well that she would be a liability at the polls.

The current president, Tsai Ing-wen, is pro-independence in theory, but like most Taiwanese is not in favor of a unilateral declaration anytime soon and prefers to maintain the status quo. She has had her cheekier moments, though, such as when she rang Donald Trump to congratulate him on his presidential election victory, and, oblivious to the diplomatic consequences, he took her call. It was the first phone conversation between a Taiwanese leader and an American president in over forty years. Despite Tsai's stance and the apparent stability of relations between the two countries, it was surprising to me how many people I spoke to in China and Taiwan—perhaps the majority—who said they were bracing for unification (Beijing calls it “reunification”—they can't even agree on the term) in the near future, the most likely scenario being a “flash invasion” from the Fujian coast under the pretext of a military exercise. Some even claimed to know the specifics of the plan: cyber attacks would support an amphibious assault on the north coast, before the paratroopers landed at Taoyuan International Airport in Taipei. British journalist Steve Crook is more optimistic. “I have been here over twenty years, and throughout, people have been saying China is about to invade,” he told me. “It's like nuclear fusion. It's always just around the corner.”

Others doubt that the Chinese military would have it quite so easy. Though Taiwanese troop numbers have fallen from 270,000 in the early 2000s to 180,000 now, there are still 1.5 million reservists, and the island could be quite tricky to conquer. During the Pacific War, the Americans considered attacking Taiwan to use it as a base for the assault on Japan, but they judged it unassailable and instead chose Okinawa.

If China were to invade, that would theoretically draw America and Japan into the conflict. According to the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the United States has pledged to “resist any resort to force ... that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan.” But would the Americans actually intervene? Beijing clearly already interferes with Taiwan's economy and constantly threatens its security, but America does nothing.

There has long been talk of holding an independence referendum. If that does happen, it would make Brexit look like a show of hands at a village green bowling club. Imagine the threats and interference there would be from mainland China. It would be fascinating to see how the Taiwanese vote, how many of them vote (previous national referendums have been judged invalid when turnout was low because they were boycotted by the KMT and its supporters), and how many vote in favor, with China's sword of Damocles hovering over their heads.

I meet one of the Taiwanese independence campaigners one day at the foot of the Taipei 101 tower, the capital's new landmark skyscraper. His name is Richard; he is in his late sixties and is wearing a Free Taiwan Party (FTP) baseball cap and a sweatshirt proclaiming: "My name is Xi Jinping and I am for Taiwan independence." He and a handful of fellow protesters are standing around holding flags promoting the FTP—"the only party who advocate Taiwan Independence."

"I am not afraid to die for independence," Richard tells me, smiling amiably. He believes about 20 percent of the Taiwanese population feels the same way. In a 2018 poll of one thousand Taiwanese, 20.1 percent wanted immediate unification with China (not the same as being willing to *die* for it, of course), 24.1 percent were satisfied with the status quo, almost 40 percent wanted independence at some point in the future, and the rest didn't know.

Richard's parents came to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek, but he was born here, and though he doesn't speak Taiwanese very well (the Taiwanese language is a dialect from Fujian, but since 1945, Mandarin has been the official language of Taiwan, and most people speak both), he considers himself Taiwanese, not Chinese: "Taiwan should be an independent country. No question. I think it will happen within the next three years, because of international support. There is no way we will unify with Beijing."

He admits that the possibility of Chinese military action against Taiwan is also highly likely. "I expect it. Maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow. Soon. But just because China is big, it doesn't mean it is strong. Taiwan is small, but we are strong. We can fight back. We can defend." Japan will help,

Richard is sure of that. “If they don’t, they won’t only have lost Taiwan, but their credibility internationally, and their strategic power [as well]. Once China takes Taiwan, there will be no safety for Japan.” Okinawa could be next—some Chinese have hinted at a claim to Japan’s southern archipelago in the past. Japan and China are, he feels, destined to fight. “In the minds of the Chinese, they have a very, very deep hate toward the Japanese.” He predicts that conflict will happen sooner rather than later, because the more Japan militarizes, the more difficult it will be for China.

KMT politician Jason Hsu took a different view: “Emotionally we think of ourselves as independent, but when people on the street say they are willing to pick up a gun to fight, that it is very much all talk.” Independence was not a priority for the younger generation, he claimed. “There is too much at stake for China to use force against Taiwan. There are so many other ways for them to achieve what they want. They could shut down the flight routes or devalue their currency—all this could paralyze the economy.” Besides, he added, China had other priorities: growing tension with India, Xi’s Belt and Road project, North Korea, the trade war with America, corruption ...

Mr. Kuo, the Japanese army veteran, was similarly optimistic about the future of Taiwan. He had predicted greater openness, democracy, and full independence. “We are just waiting for the right timing, but within the next few years I believe the president will be ready to announce the end of the Republic of China. It should be now, the time for Taiwan to make a new country.”

The relationship between Taiwan and China is clearly complex, while that of Taiwan and Japan appears broadly positive. It hadn’t really occurred to me to ask about the relationship between Taiwan and the third of my “tigers,” South Korea, but somehow it crops up while I am talking to Emily Chuang, a Taiwanese publisher with whom I had been put in touch by a mutual Japanese friend.

“Oh, we really don’t like the Koreans,” she tells me blithely. She and I are having dinner at the time, in a Japanese restaurant housed in a beautifully preserved old wooden Japanese house. I stop eating, chopsticks half-raised.

“What do you mean? Why on earth...?”

The South Koreans don't respect the Taiwanese, she says, and perhaps the Taiwanese have a kind of inferiority complex toward the South Koreans too.

“They cheat. They cheat a lot” is the scathing verdict of another Taiwanese woman I am introduced to the next day over lunch. South Korea has never done anything to Taiwan, I protest. “But they get up people's noses. Their clannishness. You know Koreans are related to Mongolians,” she adds, as if this seals her argument.

Taiwanese historian Mike Liu puts it this way: “Taiwan became a Japanese colony in 1895. South Korea only became part of the Japanese empire in 1911, and many of the things the Japanese had done in Taiwan were copied in Korea. So, in that sense, some Taiwanese think of the Koreans as late-comers. *‘You learned from us.’*” Another source of Taiwanese feelings of superiority is that during the colonial era, many comfort women were brought to Taiwan from Korea. “So you can see what kinds of social images we had of Koreans. There is this feeling, ‘We look down on you, but you don't even respect us. How can I stand that?’” he concludes.

All this friction is compounded by the age-old geopolitical order: for centuries the Chinese looked down on Korea as a vassal state, and where did a large proportion of the Taiwanese population come from? China. “We consider ourselves the big brother and they are the little brother,” says Liu. You can see how South Korea's economic ascendancy in the 1980s might have put Taiwan's nose out of joint. Confucius still has so much to answer for in East Asia, it seems. “We are still fighting about who should be the big brother,” agrees Liu. “About who should be at the center.” He is in no doubt about Taiwan's position in the hierarchy, however: “Taiwan should learn to be a small country. We always think we should play an important role. That is what the KMT, the Chinese, taught us—that Taiwan is a big country, that it has a role on the international platform and political arena, but actually, no, it isn't!”

“Yes, Taiwanese people loathe South Koreans,” Jason Hsu confirms. “It goes way back to when South Korea broke ties with Taiwan in favor of

China in the early 1980s.” There has also been some ugly business with Samsung and LG poaching senior executives from Taiwanese companies, but Hsu says that the rivalry is most obvious during sporting events, particularly baseball. Taiwan is used to losing, but losing to South Korea hurts more than anything. Really, he admits, it boils down to Taiwan feeling that it doesn’t get enough respect from its neighbor across the East China Sea.

After all the positive news about Taiwanese-Japanese relations, the bombshell of this Taiwanese animosity toward the South Koreans fills me with a good deal of gloom. These two nations have fought no wars against each other, have never brutalized or enslaved each other’s women or exploited each other’s resources; in fact they have so much in common, there are so many similarities in their recent histories: Japanese occupation followed by military dictatorship, the threat of China, American meddling, economic miracles, and democracy. If the Taiwanese can find something to hate in the South Koreans, then what hope is there for the entire region?

Again, the young offer hope. The young Chinese people I spoke to told me that it was to Taiwan, not Japan, Europe, or the United States, that they looked to for pop culture trends in fashion, design, and food. “Young Chinese are chasing authenticity,” one of them said. “Taiwan is at the forefront in the Mandarin world in terms of the hipster scene, the artisanal baristas, craft beer, that loose, woolen, natural clothing.”

You mean, dressing like a vegan? I asked.

“Yes, exactly. The vegan look.”

Vegan aspiration is a straw to cling to, granted, but when one is in search of positive signs for future pan-Asian amity, one must grab them where one finds them.

Epilogue

From Taiwan, I have to return briefly to Japan for one final research trip. Just before I leave Taipei, I receive a slightly panicked email from my publisher in Tokyo. A “serious problem” has arisen in Okinawa, he writes.

A Japanese newspaper is reporting that a school textbook there has published an extract from something I wrote a decade earlier in which I had described the Okinawan delicacy *tofuyo* in, let’s say, disparaging terms. *Tofuyo* is the Okinawan version of the stinky tofu whose pungent aroma I had been encountering in the night markets of Taipei. When I first tasted it ten years ago, I had scarfed down an entire cube of the fermented soybean snack, and deeply regretted it. The joke had been on me—one is supposed to nibble *tofuyo* using a toothpick—but the Okinawans are understandably sensitive to slights on their indigenous culture. They were not happy.

The next email in my inbox is from an anonymous admirer who has clearly seen the newspaper report:

Please never ever come to Japan again. all of Japanese people do not want to see you. we hate you we do not like you, because of you are racist and you are the pits as human being. please enjoy and immerse superior complex with rotten food with your sense of taste disorder. you are completely disgusting! from Japan with horrible feeling.

My publisher suggests that I might want to prepare an apology. They have arranged a few interviews with Japanese radio and print journalists to promote a new book of mine, which, by coincidence, is being published in Japanese this week. Clearly, I have to be ready should any of the journalists ask me about what I am coming to think of as “*tofuyo*-gate.”

The irony of my situation—that I am concluding my journey through the fraught geopolitical relationships of East Asia by having to make my own public apology to the Japanese for a passage in one of *their* school textbooks—is so great that at first, I don’t even make the connection. But

here I am. I am going to have to grovel. After toying with a weaselly “I am sorry if people were offended but...” approach, or even a revisionist denial that I ever wrote the words, I go with a full mea culpa, no excuses, no mitigation, and, fortunately for me, nothing more is made of the affair.

Does this personal experience give me a fresh insight into the issues and conflicts of twenty-first-century East Asia? Not especially, but by this stage, I have heard from a fairly broad range of perspectives. By definition, some of the people I spoke to for this book are deeply connected to these issues—they run museums, campaign, research or write about them, or are ambassadors, anthropologists, or politicians. And of course I also met veterans and victims of war crimes, of torture and oppression. Issues of forgiveness, atonement, retribution, and education understandably feature prominently in all these people’s lives, but having made this journey through Japan, South Korea, eastern China, and Taiwan, I offer this (not especially profound) observation: for the vast majority of the people, for the vast majority of the time, issues of the past are just that. I am fairly sure that they do not feature prominently in the day-to-day lives of the majority of the hundreds of millions who live in these countries, most of whom, like the rest of us, are just trying to get by, and many of whom are simply trying to survive.

There is a significant difference between how the Koreans and the Chinese view Japan, but then the two countries had very different experiences of the Japanese in the first half of the twentieth century. Japan only conquered parts of east and north China, perhaps a quarter of the country in total. These were densely populated territories—Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Hong Kong—but still, large swathes of China were never ruled by Japan, and their people are unlikely to hold a grudge against the Japanese, despite the best efforts of Beijing’s propaganda machine.

Korea, on the other hand, was annexed in its entirety for thirty-five years. The Japanese did their best to transform the country into a kind of Outer Japan, and while the Korean resistance was brave and persistent, over the decades many Koreans also collaborated with the Japanese, and many more benefited from the modernization the Japanese brought. This leaves a complex legacy, particularly when combined with remembrance of the

Imjin War and the familial tensions of Confucianism. The result is that Koreans have yet to forgive, let alone forget. In a 2013 Pew Poll of countries directly affected by Japan's military actions, 98 percent of South Koreans said that Japan had not "sufficiently apologized"; in contrast, only 47 percent in the Philippines felt this way.

Obviously the Koreans have much stronger feelings about the Japanese than the Japanese have about the Koreans, but it seems a minor tragedy, looking from the outside in, that for all of their miraculous postwar political, cultural, and economic achievements, the South Koreans still seem, at least in part, to define themselves by their oppression at the hands of the Japanese more than seventy years ago. For some, proclaiming their hatred of the Japanese is a point of pride; others take this further and consider it to be intrinsic to contemporary Korean identity. According to Van Jackson, an American academic and specialist in Asian security affairs, "collective suffering under Japan is an important part of understanding what makes Koreans Korean." One Korean I spoke to confessed, "Remove our anti-Japanese feeling, then we lose half our identity." The respected South Korea-based American political scientist Robert Kelly has written that the Korean people and their elites "have an extraordinary, and negative, fixation with Japan. Korea's media talks about Japan incessantly, usually with little journalistic objectivity and in negative terms." Kelly agrees that the Koreans have very good reasons to dislike the Japanese, but that they "do not stop there; they go over the top ... with no obvious point other than to provoke Japan." And Kelly lives in South Korea, is married to a Korean, and, famously, has Korean-American children (he is better known as "BBC Dad" following the interruption of a live broadcast by his young daughter).

South Korea's president Moon Jae-in was quite right when he said in a speech in March 2018 that it is not up to the perpetrator (let alone an outsider like me) to judge their atonement sufficient or to demand that the victims "get over it," but at some point, victims do usually attempt to move on, for their own sake as much as anything else. Unfortunately, magnanimity appears to be a rare commodity among Moon's compatriots.

And if you thought the South Koreans were good at bearing a grudge, meet their cousins in the North. This is a typical recent statement on Japan

from North Korea's state media: "Japan, a matchless political dwarf, showed again its childish appearance to the world ... Enraged at the news of Japan samurais' rude action, the army and people of the DPRK are now burning their hearts with revenge on island barbarians, the sworn enemy of the Korean nation."

In this new era of friendship between them, the North and South are already gearing up for combined efforts to take the Japanese to task for what they consider unfinished business from the occupation era. A joint body, the Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation, has been discussing for some months reclaiming the remains of thousands of Koreans taken to Japan as forced laborers during the 1930s and '40s. The Koreans say there could be tens or hundreds of thousands of sets of remains, although only 2,770 are registered at temples in Japan. This is an ominous sign for those who have hoped that improved relations, and perhaps even one day the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, might present an opportunity for wiping clean the historical slate and looking ahead in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead, the one issue that seems guaranteed to unite the North and the South is their shared hatred of the Japanese. A recent Gallup poll of one thousand South Koreans showed that twice as many (10 percent) had a positive view of Kim Jong-un, a man who has for years threatened them with annihilation, as saw Abe Shinzo in the same light (5 percent).

Toward the end of my research into all this, it suddenly occurred to me: *I wonder whether the Korean or Chinese states have ever felt the need to offer an official apology for the actions of their armed forces.* I couldn't find anything from the Chinese, not even an apology from the CPC to its own people, but there was an interesting incident recently involving the South Korean government. South Korean forces fought alongside the Americans in the Vietnam War, during which they are alleged to have massacred civilians. In 2017 Moon Jae-in visited Vietnam. Did he apologize to the Vietnamese? In language uncannily reminiscent of that used by the Japanese, he expressed "regret" over an "unfortunate" aspect of their countries' two histories. As a Korean newspaper reported, "He was not explicit" about what exactly it was he was expressing regret about. "It

looked like an apology but it was not,” the paper quoted Tran Thi Mai Xuan, a Vietnamese activist, as saying. “I think the South Korean government should issue an official apology with sincerity.”

Perhaps Moon’s vague approach was appropriate; perhaps no more explicit apology is required from the South Koreans to the Vietnamese, or indeed from the Japanese to the South Koreans. That is one of the conclusions political scientist Jennifer Lind offers in her 2011 book *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*, which compares Franco-German postwar relations with those of the Japanese and South Koreans. Lind acknowledges that denying atrocities seriously damages relations, but says that “countries that offered contrition to foreign victims experienced an explosion of controversy that was *harmful* to foreign relations. Contrition, in other words, could be counterproductive....” Lind also points out that America and Japan have become reconciled with virtually no atonement on Japan’s part, or on America’s for the atomic bombs, because both had other priorities; similarly, Italy and Austria have almost entirely escaped blame for their part in World War II. Apologies can sometimes simply make things worse, she writes: “Anger can mobilize nationalistic sentiment in the victim country, creating a spiral of acrimony that makes reconciliation even more elusive.” And it is true that Japan’s apologies have usually achieved little in the long term, aside from provoking its own nationalists—the men in the black vans—and have hardly mollified the Koreans or the Chinese either. Eventually, the concept of “few are guilty, but all are responsible” might begin to ring hollow to even the most conciliatory Japanese. Apology fatigue sets in among even moderates.

Japan has said sorry so many times and in so many ways that I have often wondered if when it comes to these apologies, there is some linguistic nuance of which I, as a foreigner, am not aware: the Koreans and Chinese seem to hear not-quite-sorries, or sense fingers crossed behind backs. One Japanese academic I spoke to, Ota Shimpei, an anthropologist who has specialized in how the Japanese and Koreans see themselves and each other, explained that part of the problem with Japan’s apologies has been the overly formal language they have employed, using words that normally appear only in documents. “It is very formal, so it doesn’t really sound like

an apology,” Ota told me. Philip, the Gwangju pro-democracy protestor whom I had met in Seodaemun Prison in Seoul, summed up what seems to be a common suspicion in Korea—that one can never really trust what the Japanese say: “What they say with their face, and what they mean in their heart, these are two different things.” I have asked many Koreans to spell out their objections to the Japanese apologies for me, and they always say the same kind of thing—that the Japanese are insincere or vague, that they don’t mean it, but as I saw at the Iris Chang Museum with the TV clip of the American author challenging the Japanese ambassador, when the words are spoken in a language I understand, there seems to be no equivocation at all.

One Chinese academic, off the record, told me that part of the reason the comfort women issue continues to reverberate in South Korea is that it is “academic production chain.” Academics receive funding to conduct research and produce books and theses, so being deaf to the apologies is profitable. That might be true of some, but to accept it as the full explanation would be to disregard the sincere and valid feelings of those with direct experience of the comfort stations.

The New Yorker recently had a perhaps more enlightening take on the importance of apologies in general to Koreans. Novelist Ed Park noted the unusual frequency with which Korean public figures offer apologies—from their presidents, to corporate leaders. Apologies are a crucial aspect of Korea’s hierarchical social structures: subordinates must apologize for their mistakes; those in charge apologize to show they are accountable. Generally, Koreans place a greater importance on being apologized to by people who have wronged them than other cultures do, wrote Park. From what I’ve seen, Japanese corporate leaders are similarly famous for their public contrition, but Park believed *han* contributes an extra stubbornness to Korean grudge-bearing, calling it “a condition born of a sense of oppression and grievance, and impossible to assuage by apologies alone.” There is a related school of thought that in Korean culture, whenever someone says sorry for some transgression, it gives the injured party the right to beat the guilty over the head in perpetuity. As one online comment I recently saw put it: “An apology is the beginning of eternal extortion in South Korean

culture.” As Niwa Uichiro, the former Japanese ambassador to China, told me when I met him in Tokyo: “The Japanese will forgive even war crimes, but even for one thousand years the Chinese and Koreans will never forgive. It’s a completely different culture. Even though they have never been in Japan, never read any books about Japan, still they feel unfavorable to Japanese and Japan.”

Several people I met in China and Korea mentioned that tensions would not recur quite so regularly if the Japanese would—and I paraphrase here—“just shut up about it all.” “The best way to solve this problem is that they agree to never speak about it anymore, never visit Yasukuni again,” Dr. Sun Cheng, the former adviser to the Chinese government, told me in Beijing. But Japan is a free country, a democracy, so as unpalatable as these aspects of its society are (and as frustrating as they are to those with a more totalitarian approach), they will always be part of the landscape. Then again, as one Chinese student put it to me, “Nobody is denying the Japanese right to deny their crimes or worship the criminals, but Chinese people have the right to hate them, though, right?”

Personally, I can’t understand why any politician would go within a mile of Yasukuni, but the Japanese people are comparatively well-informed about the issue; anyone can visit the shrine’s museum and view its absurd revisionism for themselves. It is up to the electorate to punish or reward those public figures who do visit, although I also understand that the Japanese have a fairly paltry choice in terms of their politicians. (“It is not that Abe is popular,” former ambassador Niwa told me. “It is that the opposition to Abe is so weak.”)

Many I spoke to in Japan and elsewhere believed that the Chinese and the Koreans are being fed crudely propagandist narratives by their political elite. Japan-bashing is a surefire hit with the electorates of both countries; it guarantees a round of applause when a politician’s popularity is waning, or offers a useful distraction from domestic crises. Professor John Breen summed up the situation well when I met him in Kyoto: “Neither the apology nor the demand for apology are entirely innocent. They all come out of very complex political backgrounds,” he said. One academic I met in Taiwan tried to convince me that *all* the animosity in South Korea (and

probably China too, for that matter) toward Japan was manufactured by politicians, for whom there are always benefits to stirring up this anti-Japanese sentiment. “It was very important to manufacture that hatred of Japan in South Korea because a lot of South Koreans collaborated with Japan. To hide that, everybody has to hate Japan,” he said.

Meanwhile, the opposite political strategy—rapprochement with Japan—offers few benefits to Korean and Chinese politicians and risks providing Japanese right-wing extremists with further ammunition, because they can claim that the “enemy” are admitting they were wrong all along. For Japanese politicians and campaigners who urge greater contrition for their country’s war crimes, the risks can be even greater: assassination attempts are not unknown, but Japanese progressives, indeed, anyone who advocates a conciliatory approach toward the country’s former colonies, also risk being bracketed with the ranting anti-Japanese lobby in South Korea—hardly appealing bedfellows.

But I do struggle with the notion that the people of East Asia are so passive that their political leaders can, as Jennifer Lind puts it, so easily “shape,” “transform,” and “craft the narrative” of their region’s relationships. East Asians may not be particularly renowned for their rampant individualism, but neither are they as sheeplike as this conclusion suggests. As the recent mass protests in Seoul demanding (and achieving) the impeachment of a president demonstrate, the South Koreans can be notably anti-authoritarian when the fancy strikes them. And if the Japanese were that passive, then how come at least half of them oppose Abe Shinzo’s great, long-term political goal of amending Article 9 to allow their country to become a legitimate military power (according to a recent poll by *Kyodo News* that is consistent with most polls in the past)? In a September 2018 *Asahi Shimbun* poll of two thousand Abe supporters, only 5 percent considered constitutional reform important; most just wanted him to focus on the economy.

Education has a critical role to play in all this. In an ideal world, children of all nations would learn the good and bad about their forefathers’ deeds, but this is rarely the case. Who in British schools teaches about the Bengal Famine of 1943, in which perhaps as many as three million

perished, many argue as a direct result of British government policy? What are American children taught about the Iraq War, I wonder? The Japanese used to be better at this than most of us though, and were definitely better than their neighbors. “History Textbooks and the Wars in Asia” by Shin Giwook and Daniel Sneider of Stanford University, a 2011 academic survey of Chinese, South Korean, and Japanese history textbooks, showed Chinese and South Korean history books to be revisionist to an extraordinary extent, as well as aggressively nationalist and highly selective, omitting reference to the role of the Americans in defeating the Japanese and all mention of the atomic bombing of Japan, for instance. Japanese books, on the other hand, were the least likely to stir up patriotic fervor. According to the researchers, the Japanese books offered a clear message: “The wars in Asia were a product of Japan’s imperial expansion and the decision to go to war with the United States was a disastrous mistake that inflicted a terrible cost on the nation and its civilian population.” Back in 2011 Japanese textbooks might have had a line or two about the comfort women and Nanjing, describing the latter as a “massacre” and not merely an “incident.” Sadly, from what I hear, the Japanese government has now removed all such references to what it considers “masochistic” or “unpatriotic” history. Rather than simply teaching the truth about what happened using the known facts, in an uncanny, perhaps intentional echo of Japan’s wartime educational indoctrination, its history curriculum aims instead to instill a “love of country” in the youth. Surely, though, in 2019 Japanese society is mature enough to teach its children the truth. At least then the Japanese might occupy the moral high ground in terms of education.

How have school history classes, schlocky TV war dramas, and political rhetoric affected mutual perceptions among the peoples of East Asia? A 2018 Genron NPO poll of one thousand people in South Korea, Japan, and China offers some slightly heartening news from these fractious siblings. The percentage of South Koreans who had a “bad impression” of the Japanese has declined since the last poll in 2017. It is still a shade over half the population, but in 2013 it was at 77 percent. The percentage of Japanese who had a bad impression of Koreans has also declined since 2017, from 48.6 percent to 46.3 percent—although five years ago it was only 37

percent, so the situation is not completely clear-cut. The Japanese and Chinese have more negative views of each other than the Japanese and South Koreans do. Each nation thinks the other is potentially violent, and over 80 percent of Chinese and Japanese respondents interviewed for a 2016 Pew poll held “unfavorable” views of the other. Only 11 percent of Japanese looked favorably upon the Chinese, and 14 percent of Chinese felt the same way about the Japanese. Only 10 percent of Chinese people felt that Japan had apologized enough for the war. It looks like those TV dramas are still working, and the record-high numbers of Chinese tourists visiting Japan are having less of an impact than one might hope.

Encouragingly, young people (under their mid-thirties) in all these countries tend to have more favorable views of their neighbors, and herein lies some small hope that relations might one day improve. Without exception, the younger people I met on my journey seemed more open to friendly relations with their neighbors, were more relaxed about their admiration for one another, and were less likely to bear the grudges of the past with the same vehemence as their parents and grandparents. As the Zainichi filmmaker Yang Yong-hi said of the younger generation of South Koreans: “They really want to have a good relationship with Japan. They really love Japanese culture, and want to be good friends with Japanese people. Perhaps they don’t feel like that about the Japanese government, but they do about the people.” Of young South Koreans, British journalist Andrew Salmon had this to say: “They don’t think about the Japanese twenty-four/seven anymore. What is happening right now with the younger generation is they are trying to find their own identity—‘We’re young, we’re cool, we’re funky. We’ve got big companies. We’re democratic.’ The story of Korea is of a courageous national success. They don’t see it themselves, but they’re starting to.”

“They are apart from that historical colonialism, and they travel a lot to Japan,” one young Korean told me of her peers. “They really love Japanese culture and products. Our school textbooks of course teach bad stuff about Japan, but that doesn’t really affect the mentality of the younger generation. Me and many of my friends really admire Japan. There’s almost no bad feeling toward Japan. They love Japan. So there might be people who feel

resentment toward what Japan did in the past, but they realize that is a different thing from the current culture.”

That emerging national self-confidence among younger South Koreans might be the key to moving on from this cycle of recriminations, but if there is to be a meaningful long-term resolution to all this, it will only come gradually, over a generation or two, and it will also require joint action between all the governments, NGOs, academics, and civic groups: joint commemorations, joint memorials, joint education boards agreeing on a universal history curriculum, and joint panels to resolve territorial disputes.

Terrible wrongs were inflicted by Japan upon its neighbors, as well as by the governments of all these countries upon their own citizens, by their citizens upon one another, and by Western powers on Asian nations—all in all, it is a litany of inhumanity, and none of it should be forgotten. Most of the crimes will probably never be fully documented. They may at times have been exaggerated by various parties for various reasons, but there is ample evidence that they rank among the most damnable acts committed by any armies. Yet there is everything to be gained from all parties involved agreeing on a unified version of history, from the guilty atoning unconditionally and irrevocably for their crimes, and for these four countries to move toward a future free from denials, propaganda, populism, and rhetoric. In poll after poll, the people of East Asia say they want better relations with their neighbors and greatly fear the consequences of any worsening, which would be to everyone’s detriment and might even result in mutual destruction on an unprecedented scale. So why not?

If there is a single message I would hope that all Chinese and South Koreans, young and old, could read, it is this from Wu Xianbing, the Chinese furniture manufacturer who had set up his own museum of the Nanjing Massacre. He told me that his research had convinced him that the Japanese were not exceptional in any way: “People become monsters, and it can happen to any people, to any country. Any country could do something as atrocious as the Nanjing Massacre. It is not limited to a civilization or an ethnic group.” Equally, then, a capacity for forgiveness and reconciliation might similarly be universal. On that belief rests all our hope for the future peace and prosperity of these East Asian tigers.

Notes

Prologue

1. The South Koreans are highly adept at this kind of sly dinner diplomacy and had deliberately leaked the news of the dessert, knowing full well that it would annoy the Japanese. A few months earlier, while on a state visit to Seoul, Donald Trump had tucked into a starter at a state dinner featuring shrimp that had been farmed on Dokdo. Trump was oblivious to the symbolism of the shrimp, but the Japanese weren't. They got cross about that too.
2. The five Senkaku Islands are roughly midway between Taiwan and Okinawa, but because the Chinese claim Taiwan as their territory, they also claim these island, known as the Diaoyu Islands in China. Chinese fishermen and naval vessels regularly sail in the waters around the islands. Beijing claims they have been Chinese territory since the time of the Ming dynasty. The islands are important strategically because of their location between Taiwan and Japan. The Japanese “won” the Senkakus along with Taiwan in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, following the first Sino-Japanese War. After 1945 they were administered by the Americans, but “returned” to Japan in 1971.

1. Kurihama

1. I had always assumed Perry and his mini-armada had sailed from the West Coast of America, but in fact they went the long way, from the naval yards of Annapolis in Maryland on the East Coast, across the Atlantic to the Canaries in West Africa, around the Cape of Good Hope, then stopping at Mauritius before continuing to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai, and what is today Okinawa.
2. In this book, Japanese names are referred to in the Japanese manner, with the family name first and given name second.

3. Kotobuki

1. *Pachinko* is kind of like pinball and is insanely popular in Japan—there are over twelve thousand *pachinko* halls. It is illegal to gamble for money when playing *pachinko* but the ball bearings you “win” can usually be exchanged for prizes in a neighboring shop, also usually run by the *pachinko* parlor.
2. As many as six thousand Zainichi were killed by Japanese vigilantes in the wake of the massive earthquake—one of the twentieth century's worst natural disasters—which struck Tokyo in September 1923. False rumors were spread that the community posed a threat to people's safety—that they were poisoning wells and carrying bombs, and so on. Each year in Tokyo the massacre is

memorialized in a ceremony in Yokoamicho Park in the east of the city, but in recent years some prominent Japanese politicians have been more equivocal about the massacre. The same kind of xenophobic scaremongering still sometimes happens in Japan after earthquakes, although now it is usually online.

1. Busan

1. Apologists for the occupation will point out that rice production grew under the Japanese, but most of the crop left Korea. According to Andrew Grajdanzev's book *Modern Korea*, consumption of rice by Koreans decreased from 0.707 bushels per person in 1915 to 1919, to 0.396 in 1934 to 1938.

5. Seoul I

1. A few years back, they started installing full-length mirrors on some subway platforms in Japan, except these were an anti-suicide measure—the idea being that potential jumpers would see themselves and reconsider.

2. Neither of these statements is in any way accurate. I had been looking for an excuse to get something done for ages, and I gained no new insights from the experience, other than discovering how burning flesh smells.

10. Seoul V

1. Japan was not much better, at 54th, and the Chinese were a woeful 86th; the United States and UK were at 18th and 19th, respectively, and Taiwan a creditable 26th.

2. Jonathan Kim, the film producer, told me that the 2014 U.S. film *Whiplash*, about a sadistic jazz drum teacher and his long-suffering pupil, was much more successful in South Korea than in any other country in the world, which is rather revealing, I think.

2. Harbin II

1. Taxis were an interesting experience in Harbin. Most of them smelled as if the previous passengers had shit themselves and then died. Worse, one of them played Kenny G for an entire, hour-long ride. Also, apparently, in Harbin it is perfectly normal for one's taxi to stop during the journey to take on other passengers. The first time this happened, I wondered if I was being abducted. The taxi driver pulled over to pick up a man with a suitcase who climbed in the front of the car without even acknowledging me. We proceeded as normal to my destination, where I was (over)charged for the entire trip. The second time, I was in the front passenger seat and a father and son climbed in the back. We had a brief, friendly sign-language exchange and actually it was rather cozy.

4. Qufu

1. Neo-Confucianism was an eleventh-century attempt to rid Confucius's teachings of creeping metaphysical aspects. It still had Buddhist and Taoist elements, but was much stricter and placed a greater emphasis on poor people knowing their place and staying there. So, yes, quite contradictory.

5. Nanjing

1. One of the swords supposedly used in the competition somehow ended up in the Taiwanese Armory Museum in Taipei, its blade inscribed in Japanese "107 people killed in the Nanking battle." Recently, a violent and bizarre postscript was added to the sword's story. In August 2017 a fifty-one-year-old man, Lu Chun-yi, smashed the glass case, stole the sword from the museum, and walked a

few hundred meters around the corner to the Presidential Office Building, where he attacked a military police officer in an attempt, it is believed, to gain entry in order to behead the president, who was in her office there at the time. Lu, subsequently revealed to be suffering from mental issues, was also carrying a Chinese flag. The policeman was struck on the neck, but he survived. Members of Lu's family told investigators that he had become obsessed with television programs from Chinese state networks, like the wartime series I had been seeing. One of his family members was quoted in a Taiwanese newspaper as saying, "These Chinese TV programs had strong effects on him, as he became a fervent political enthusiast, with extremist pro-China views and actively [supported] Taiwan returning to the 'Chinese Motherland.'"

6. Shanghai I

1. The end of the one-child policy might be a good thing from the point of view of the aging population, but it was pointed out to me by one young Chinese woman that it could also have negative effects: "The last generation of Chinese girls got a better education and more attention growing up. In this way, the one-child policy improved the status of women in China." Now, she said, she was worried that they would end up like women in Japan, a situation she found lamentable, citing a recent news story about female applicants to Tokyo Medical University having their grades doctored to give male applicants an advantage.

8. Hong Kong I

1. The twelve heads are considered by many to be the ultimate lost treasures of Qing art, and the Chinese government blocked the sale of Saint Laurent's piece. What's more, in recent years, there has been a spate of intriguing thefts from European museums in which the thieves have exclusively swiped items looted from the summer palace, leading some to suggest that either the Chinese government or civic-minded billionaires are taking back what they believe is rightfully theirs.

2. Chinese Taipei

1. One such memorial takes the form of a shrine and statue to a twenty-year-old Japanese fighter pilot, Sugiura Shigemine, who is fondly remembered for remaining in his crippled Mitsubishi A6M Zero during a dogfight with American aircraft from the 3rd Fleet in October 1944, managing to steer it clear of a village and crashing it instead into a field. Today Sugiura is considered a deity, General Flying Tiger. When I read about him, just before arriving in Taiwan, it struck me that while the Koreans were erecting statues to shame the Japanese, the Taiwanese were doing the opposite.

Index

The index that appeared in the print version of this title does not match the pages in your e-book. Please use the search function on your e-reading device to search for terms of interest. For your reference, the terms that appear in the print index are listed below.

Abe Shinzo

- and constitutional reform of Article
- grandson of Kishi Nobusuke
- and history of Korean comfort women
- immigration increases under
- and Japanese fertility rate
- Japanese public opinion of
- and knowledge of Unit 731 (germ warfare unit)
- military spending increases under
- South Korean public opinion of
- and Yasukuni Shrine

Ahn Jung-geun

Akihito, Emperor

Asahi Shimbun (Japanese newspaper)

Asaka, Prince Yasuhiko

Aso Taro

atonement

Auden, W. H.

Beijing, China

- anti-Japanese protests

- and Marco Polo Bridge Incident

- Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression

- National Museum of China

- Tiananmen Square Massacre (1989)

Benedict, Ruth

Biddle, James
Boxer Rebellion
Breen, John
Breen, Michael
Burma
Burma Railway
Burmese Harp, The (film)
Bush, George W.

Carter, Jimmy
chaebol (South Korean family-owned conglomerate)
 and Asian economic crisis of 1997
 and Confucian principles
 and corruption
 five largest chaebol
 history of
 Hyundai
 jobs at
 legal and political influence of
 LG Electronics
 Lotte
 reform
 Samsung
 SK
 strength of
Chang An-lo (White Wolf)
Chang Chihyun
Chang, Iris
Chang Woo-hoi
Cheng, Sun
Cheong Young-rok
Chiang Kai-shek
 and Hong Kong
 and Taiwan
China
 Belt and Road project
 Chinese comfort women
 Communist Party of China (CPC)
 and Confucianism
 cultural and sexual norms
 Cultural Revolution
 declaration of People's Republic of China
 demographic changes
 education
 fascination with Japanese culture
 First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95)
 Great Leap Forward

jingri (form of cosplay)
and Manchurian Incident (1931)

media and internet access

one-child policy

Qing dynasty

Qingdao

Qufu

rural China

Taiping Rebellion

Wanping

wartime dramas

See also Beijing, China; Harbin, China; Second Sino-Japanese War; Shanghai, China

Cho Hyun-min

Cho Won-tae

Cho Yang-ho

Choi Kyu-hong

Choi Soon-sil

Chun Doo-hwan

Chung Yoo-ra

comfort women

and Asia Women's Fund

Chinese

comfort stations

Dutch

Filipino

House of Sharing (South Korea)

Japanese governmental inquiries and apologies

and Kono Statement

Korean

legal cases

protesters on behalf of

revisionist and conspiracy theories

South Korean public opinion on

statues of

treatment of

Confucianism

The Analects

and China

definition of

and South Korea

and Taiwan

and Zainichi

Crook, Steve

Cumings, Bruce

Dai Wenming

De Mente, Boyé Lafayette

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)
Democratic People's Republic of Korea. *See* North Korea
Deng Xiaoping
Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute
Durdin, F. Tillman

East India Company (EIC)
Enomoto Masayo
Eunkook Mark Suh

Fillmore, Millard. *See also* Perry, Matthew Calbraith
First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95)
 Treaty of Shimonoseki
Fitch, George
food and restaurants
 bindaetteok (mung bean pancakes)
 chopsticks
 coffee (South Korea)
 donburi
 jjajangmyeon (noodles)
 makgeolli (yeasty, milky fermented rice drink)
 ramen
 stinky tofu (*tofuyo*)
 sushi
 yakitori
Fujioka Nobukatsu

germ warfare
Gill, Tom
Gladwell, Malcolm
Glosserman, Brad
Gomikawa Junpei
Gwangju Massacre

Haas, Mark
Haemin Sunim
Hanjin Group
Hanwha Group
Harbin, China
 administrative center for Trans-Siberian Railway
 and assassination of Itō Hirobumi
 and classical music
 Japanese Germ Warfare Experimental Base Museum (Unit 731 museum)
 Kwantung Army Epidemic Prevention Squad (Unit 731)
 population
Harris, Arthur "Bomber"

Hashimoto Ryutaro
Hashimoto Toru
Helgesen, Geir
Hirohito, Emperor
 and biological weapons (Unit 731) deployment
 found guilty of crimes against humanity
 immunity from prosecution in Tokyo Trial of 1946
 and imperial divinity
 and Japan's acknowledgment of culpability in World War II
 surrender of Japan in World War II

Hiroshima, Japan
Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum
historical revisionism

Hodgson, C. Pemberton

Honda Katsuichi

Hong, Euny

Hong Kong

 Japanese occupation of
 and Opium Wars
 and Treaty of Nanjing
 Umbrella Movement (2014)
 and World War II

Horseshoe Crab Museum

Hsu, Jason

Hu Jintao

Hu Yaobang

Hyundai

Ikeda Miko

Imjin War

 Battle of Myeongnyang
 Battle of Noryang
 Kyoto nose tomb
 Thousand Nose Mound and Gaeamsa Temple

International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Trial)

Ishihara Shintaro

Ishii Shiro

Ishii Yoko (Random Yoko)

Ishiwara Kanji

Jacques, Martin

Jang Han-la

Jang Soo-hyun

Japan

 Allied occupation of
 annexation of Korea (1910)
 Article 9 of Japanese constitution

Article 20 of Japanese constitution
Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility
Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery
Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute
economy
employment
Foreign General Cemetery
Fukuoka
and germ warfare
Great Kanto Earthquake
Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere project
Imjin War
immigration statistics
invasion of China (1931)
kamikaze (make wind)
kamikaze pilots
Kurihama
Manchurian Incident (1931)
Meiji Restoration
military
Nagasaki
Nara
Nippon Kaigi (right-wing revisionist group)
occupation of Hong Kong
occupation of Korea
occupation of Taiwan
and patriotism
Raumen Museum (Yokohama)
Rising Sun Flag (Kyokujitsu-ki)
sakoku (closed period)
samurai class
Second Sino-Japanese War (1937)
South Korean people and culture compared with
Tōkaidō Highway
Treaty on Basic Relations
Violence Against Women in War Network-Japan
wakon yosai (Japanese spirit/Western technology)
Women's International Tribunal on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery
yakuza (transnational organized criminal gang members)
Yokosuka naval base
zaibatsu (conglomerate business model)
See also First Sino-Japanese War; Kyoto, Japan; Second Sino-Japanese War; Yokohama, Japan;
Zainichi
Jeong Ho-cheol

Kang Gong-hyeop
Kang Jang-heon

Kato Koichi
Kawamura Takashi
Kawashima Kiyoshi
Kelly, Robert
Kerr, Alex
Kim Dae-jung
Kim Dong-seon
Kim Hak-soon
Kim Hak-sun
Kim Hye-sun
Kim Hyon-hui
Kim Il-sung
Kim, Jonathan
Kim Jong-il
Kim Jong-un
Kim Moo-sung
Kim Soon-deok
Kim Young-sam
Kim Yun-Jin
Kim dynasty. *See also individual leaders*
Kingston, Jeff
Kishi Nobusuke
Kitano Masaji
Koizumi Junichiro
Koizumi Shinjiro
Kokovtsov, Vladimir
Komei, Emperor
Kondo Hajime
Kono Taro
Kono Yohei
Korean Air
Korean Peninsula
 division at 38th parallel
 as “Hermit Kingdom”
 Imjin War
 Japanese annexation of (1910)
 Korean War
 and reunification
 Samguk Sagi (chronicles of Three Kingdoms era)
 and Second World War
 See also North Korea; South Korea
Koster, Samuel
Kuo Chen-tsun
Kyoto, Japan
 history of
 Imjin War noses tomb
 imperial seat
 machiya (townhouses) in

sakura (cherry blossom trees) in
significance of for Japanese people
and Tōkaidō Highway
UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Lam Tsz-kin, Howard
Le Pen, Jean-Marie
Lee Dasom
Lee Jae-yong (Jay K. Lee)
Lee Kun-hee
Lee, Min Jin
Lee Myung-bak
Lee Ok-sun
LeMay, Curtis
LG Electronics
Li Jianli, mob beating of
Lin Zexu
Lind, Jennifer
Liu, Mike
Liu Xiaoming
Lotte
Lovell, Julia

MacArthur, Douglas
Mada Yoko, *see* Ishii Yoko
Magee, John
Manchurian Incident (1931)
Mao Zedong
 attack on Kinmen Islands
 and Confucianism
 declaration of People's Republic of China
 entry into Korean War
 founding of Communist Party
 on Japanese militarism
 Little Red Book
 meeting with Tanaka Kakuei
 on Opium Wars
 and Taiwan
Matsui Iwane
McDaniel, Charles
McGregor, Richard
McNaught, Anita
Mitta, Rana
Miyazawa Kiichi
Mizuki Shigeru
Moon Jae-in
 on atonement and remorse

- and chaebol reform
- commission of investigation into Gwangju Massacre
- economic reforms
- election of (2017)
- Liberation Day speech (2018)
- rapprochement with North Korea
- visit to Vietnam
- Moon Sun Myung
- Mukai Toshiaki
- Murayama Tomiichi

- Nagano Shigeto
- Nagatomi Hakudo
- Nakano Masahiro
- Nakasone Yasuhiro
- Nanjing Massacre
 - Iris Chang Museum
 - Museum of the War of Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression
 - Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall
- Niwa Uichiro
- Nixon, Richard
- Noda Takeshi
- Noda Yoshihiko
- North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea)
 - April 2018 inter-Korean summit
 - Blue House Raid (1968)
 - and bombing of Korean Air Flight 858
 - and Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)
 - economy
 - Juche (state ideology)
 - military
 - nuclear capability and missile tests
 - See also* Korean Peninsula

- Obama, Barack
- O Sonfa
- Okuno Seisuke
- Olympic Games
 - "Chinese Taipei" competitors
 - Pyeongchang Winter Olympics (2018)
 - Tokyo Summer Olympics (2020)
- Opium Wars
- Orientalism
- Osaka Human Rights Museum
- Osaka International Peace Center (Peace Osaka)
- Ota Shimpei

Pan, Jason
Park Chan-wook
Park Chung-hee
 assassination attempt
 assassination of
 and Confucianism
 economics and industry under
 military dictatorship of
 and United States
 and Zainichi
Park Doo-ri
Park, Ed
Park Geun-hye
Park Sangin
Park, Stephanie Sehoi
Park Yu-ha
Pearl Harbor attack
People's Republic of China. *See* China
Perry, Matthew Calbraith
 founder of Foreign General Cemetery
 significance of
 Treaty of Kanagawa
Pilling, David
Pu-yi

Qin Gang
Qiu, Peipei

Rabe, John
Rees, Laurence
Republic of China. *See* Taiwan
Republic of Korea. *See* South Korea
Rhee, Syngman
Richardson, C. L.
Roh Moo-hyun
Roh Tae-woo
Rusk, Dean
Russo-Japanese War (1904–05)

Said, Edward
Salmon, Andrew
Samsung
San Francisco Peace Conference (1951)
Scidmore, Eliza
Seaton, Philip
Second Sino-Japanese War (1937)
 Battle of Xuzhou

- Marco Polo Bridge Incident
- Nanjing Massacre
- and World War II
- Senda Kako
- Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands
- Seoul, South Korea
 - Ahn Jung-geun museum
 - air pollution
 - Gangnam District
 - Myeongdong (shopping and nightlife district)
 - Namsangol Hanok Village
 - Seodaemun Prison
 - War Memorial of Korea
- sexual slavery. *See also* comfort women
- Shanghai, China
 - museum dedicated to Chinese comfort women
 - reputation as good-time city
- Shinozuka Yoshio
- Shinto
 - and constitutional separation of state and religion
 - Ise Grand Shrine
 - Izumo Taisha
 - Yasukuni Shrine
- Sino-Japanese Wars. *See* First Sino-Japanese War; Second Sino-Japanese War
- SK
- slave labor
- Snyder, Scott
- social media
- Song Sok-je (Song Sokze)
- South Korea (Republic of Korea)
 - April 2018 inter-Korean summit
 - architecture
 - bodily habits and personal grooming
 - borit-gogae* (spring famine)
 - Busan
 - chaebol reform
 - and Christianity
 - climate
 - and Confucianism
 - cosmetic surgery and personal appearance
 - Daecheon Beach (Boryeong)
 - and Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)
 - Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute
 - economy
 - education
 - employment
 - e-sports industry
 - film and television

Gaeamsa Temple (Buan)
Gwangju Massacre
Haesindang Park (Penis Park)
hagwon (after-school crammers)
hallyu (Korean popular culture wave)
and *han*
and happiness
Incheon
Japanese people and culture compared with
K-beauty
Kia Stinger
K-pop
land reform
“Miracle on the Han”
Mokpo
and Mormons
Mud Festival
news media
Pyeongchang Winter Olympics (2018)
sexual mores
smartphone use
Treaty on Basic Relations
and Unification Church (Moonies)
Unification Rice
United Nations World Happiness report ranking (2018)
US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system
wages
Winter Sonata (television series)
See also chaebol; Korean Peninsula; Seoul, South Korea
Su Zhiliang
Sun Yat-sen
Surdej, Eric

Taiwan (Republic of China)
2–28 Memorial Museum (Taipei)
Bamboo Union (gang)
and Chiang Kai-shek
Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall (Taipei)
and China
Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)
Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute
domestic politics
free speech
immigration and demographics
indigenous population
Japanese occupation of
Kuomintang (KMT)

Mazu (religious procession)
migration of Fujianese (Hoklo) to
migration of Hakka to
National Palace Museum (Taipei)
organized crime and corruption
social politics
and South Korea
temples
White Terror
Wushe Incident (1930)
Takata Makoto (Sakurai Makoto)
Takeshima. *See* Dokdo Islands/Takeshima dispute
Tanaka Kakuei
Tei Tai-kin
Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system
textbooks
Tojo Hideki
Tokugawa shogunate
 and Perry Expedition
 Tokugawa Iemochi
 Tokugawa Yoshinobu
Tokyo Trial (1946)
Toyotomi Hideyoshi
Treaty of Nanjing
Trump, Donald
Trump Inauguration Syndrome
Tsai Ing-wen
Tsuchiya Yoshio
Tudor, Daniel
Turton, Michael

Uemura Hazime

Vietnam War

Wang Yi
Wang Zheng
Warmbier, Otto
Wickham, John
World War I
World War II
 and Hong Kong
 Japanese 15th of August commemoration
 and Japanese atonement
 Japanese forced conscription of Koreans
 kamikaze pilots
 Pearl Harbor attack

sexual enslavement by Japanese during
US air raids on Osaka

Wu Ming-yi

Wu Xianbing

Xi Jinping

Xiao Ren

“Yang, Professor” (pseudonym for history professor in Hong Kong)

Yang Yong-hi

Dear Pyongyang (documentary)

Our Homeland (fictional film)

Sona, the Other Myself (documentary)

Yasuda Koichi

Yasukuni Shrine

Arlington National Cemetery defense of Yūshūkan Museum

civilian attacks on

honden (main hall)

nainaijin (receptacle for spirits of the dead)

prime ministerial visits

war criminals enshrined at

Yūshūkan (military and war museum)

Yi Sun-shin

Yokohama, Japan

Chinatown

Koreatown proposal

Kotobuki (district)

Yoshimi Yoshiaki

Yoshimura Hirofumi

Yoshimura Hisato

Young, Mark

Young Ruk-chuk

Yuk Young-soo

Zainichi (resident Koreans in Japan)

anti-Zainichi prejudice and protests

categories of

Chongryon (North Korean sympathizers)

history of

meaning and use of the term

Mindan (Zainichi affiliated with South Korea)

in Osaka

and Osaka Human Rights Museum

population statistics

return project

in Shin Okubo district

treatment of in World War II

Zaitokukai (Citizen's Association Against the Privileges of Old-Comer Korean Japanese)

ALSO BY MICHAEL BOOTH

The Meaning of Rice: A Culinary Tour of Japan

*Super Sushi Ramen Express: One Family's Remarkable Journey Through
the Greatest Food Nation on Earth*

*The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian
Utopia*

Eat, Pray, Eat: One Man's Accidental Search for Enlightenment

Sacré Cordon Bleu: What the French Know About Cooking

Just As Well I'm Leaving: To the Orient with Hans Christian Andersen

About the Author



Courtesy of the author

MICHAEL BOOTH is a journalist, broadcaster, and keynote speaker. He is the author of seven works of nonfiction, including the award-winning international bestseller *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* and *Super Sushi Ramen Express*. He is a correspondent for *Monocle* magazine and Monocle M24 radio, as well as other international publications. His works have been adapted by BBC Radio in the UK and NHK TV in Japan, and translated into more than twenty languages. You can sign up for email updates [here](#).



**Thank you for buying this
St. Martin's Press ebook.**

To receive special offers, bonus content,
and info on new releases and other great reads,
sign up for our newsletters.

Sign Up

Or visit us online at
us.macmillan.com/newslettersignup

For email updates on the author, click [here](#).

First published in the United States by St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group

THREE TIGERS, ONE MOUNTAIN. Copyright © 2020 by Michael Booth. All rights reserved. For information, address St. Martin's Publishing Group, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

www.stmartins.com

Cover design by Young Jin Lim

Cover photographs: tiger (upper right) © View Stock/Getty Images; tiger (upper left) © INTERFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo; stripes © Photosynthesis/Alamy Stock Photo; tiger (bottom left) © Historical Views/age fotostock

The Library of Congress has cataloged the print edition as follows:

Names: Booth, Michael, author.

Title: Three tigers, one mountain: a journey through the bitter history and current conflicts of China, Korea, and Japan / Michael Booth.

Other titles: Journey through the bitter history and current conflicts of China, Korea, and Japan

Description: First edition. | New York: St. Martin's Press, [2020] | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019047190 | ISBN 9781250114068 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781250114075 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: East Asia—Description and travel. | Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945—East Asia—Influence. | Public opinion—East Asia.

Classification: LCC DS508.2 .B66 2020 | DDC 950.4/3—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019047190>

eISBN 9781250114075

Our ebooks may be purchased in bulk for promotional, educational, or business use. Please contact the Macmillan Corporate and Premium Sales Department at 1-800-221-7945, extension 5442, or by email at MacmillanSpecialMarkets@macmillan.com.

Originally published in the United Kingdom by Jonathan Cape, a division of Penguin Random House Company

First U.S. Edition: April 2020

CONTENTS

Title Page
Copyright Notice
Epigraph
Map
Prologue

JAPAN

1. Kurihama
2. Yokohama
3. Kotobuki
4. Ebisu
5. Nara
6. Kyoto
7. Osaka
8. Hiroshima
9. Fukuoka

THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

1. Busan
2. Mokpo
3. Buan
4. Gwangju
5. Seoul I
6. Seoul II
7. Daechon Beach, Boryeong
8. Seoul III
9. Seoul IV

10. Seoul V
11. Seoul VI
12. DMZ
13. Seoul VII
14. Incheon

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

1. Harbin I
2. Harbin II
3. Beijing
4. Qufu
5. Nanjing
6. Shanghai I
7. Shanghai II
8. Hong Kong I
9. Hong Kong II

TAIWAN

1. The Republic of China
2. Chinese Taipei
3. Free China

Epilogue

Notes

Index

Also by Michael Booth

About the Author

Copyright