

Shin, Gi-Wook; Park, Soon-Won; Yang, Daqing (Hrsg.): *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia. The Korean Experience*. New York: Routledge 2008. ISBN: 978-0-415-77093-4; 266 p.

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This volume presents fourteen essays by fifteen scholars dealing with the ways in which East Asia, especially Korea, has come to terms with both internal and external historical injustice. This consists of twelve chapters plus an introduction and an epilogue. By presenting a wide range of research on the themes of historical injustice and reconciliation, the edited collection provides readers with the prospect of reconciliation particularly in the Northeast Asian region.

Part I of the volume entitled „Coming to terms with the darker past in Korea“ deals with Korea’s experience of historical injustice, for example issues of „comfort women“ (Chunghee Sarah Soh and Hideko Mitsui) and Korean forced laborers in the Second World War (Soon-Won Park), mass killings of civilians committed against alleged “communists” before and during the Korean War (Dong-Choon Kim and Tae-Ung Baik) and the civilian massacres committed by the South Korean military in the Vietnam War (Kyung-Yoong Bay). Korean experience both as a victim and as a perpetrator in regional and transnational dimensions is highlighted. This part provides an outline of internal and external injustices which are still highly controversial in Korea.

Part II entitled „Toward a Northeast Asian approach to historical injustice?“ contains a comparative approach between South/North Korea and Japan, and amongst Germany, Turkey, Japan. This second part investigates the parallels between war museums in South Korea and Japan (Hong Kal), the relations between North Korea and Japan (Gavan McCormack), the difference of confronting past atrocities in Germany, Turkey, and Japan (John Torpey), the role of popular culture in Korean-Japanese relations (Chiho Sawada), civil society in the post Cold War Europe and Japan (Andrew Horvat), and the importance of regional economic integration in reconciliation

in Northeast Asia (Wonhyuk Lim).

The authors’ trenchant observations of historical injustice, international relationship, memory, civil society organization, popular culture and economic interaction in the regions make the volume worth reading for all who are interested in reconciliation in the regions of Northeast Asia. One of the advantages of the editors’ approach is that it confronts the reader with the issue of reconciliation from many different angles such as history, international and domestic politics, the economy, education and so on, and from the perspectives of scholars from various disciplines. Major forces affecting reconciliation such as democratization, globalization, regional integration, and ethnic nationalism are well addressed. This volume examines the role of not only the state but also civil society and popular culture in coming to terms with the past. The transnational approach attempts to show the reader the notions of reconciliation as a mutual interactive.

As the first part of the book focuses on Korea, the editors rightly point out that Korea is „a country in which identities of victim and perpetrator coexist“ (p.11) in the introduction. The question remains, however: to what extent these coexisting identities can be maneuvered or negotiated within the society and toward others.

Although the volume provides various aspects of historical injustice, gendered violence in civilian massacres are not well explored except for the „comfort women“ case. It is well known that sexual violence was considerably committed in the Jeju April Third Incidents, in the Korean War and in the Vietnam War, but this issue has not been addressed. The volume would have profited from some considerations as to how historical injustice is committed in a gendered way.

While transnational relations within the regions of Northeast Asia are well explored, the regions seem to be deemed as a separate entity. Particularly US intervention in the regional reconciliation and security could have been further addressed.

Ethnic nationalism and lack of established civil society organizations are viewed as a hindrance of reconciliation in Northeast Asian regions in this book. The book gives short

shrift to how to overcome „thin reconciliation“ and to achieve „thick reconciliation“ processes by American philosopher David Crocker’s terms. To take the reconciliation issue further, conditions for „thick reconciliation“ processes in the regions could have been more explored in the conclusion.

The most important contribution of this timely volume is that it illustrates recent main debates on historical injustice and reconciliation in Northeast Asia, particularly in Korea. This well shows the simultaneous phenomena of de-nationalization and re-nationalization of the past in the regions and this has crucial effects on an ongoing process of reconciliation.

Yonson Ahn über Shin, Gi-Wook; Park, Soon-Won; Yang, Daqing (Hrsg.): *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia. The Korean Experience*. New York 2008, in: H-Soz-Kult 04.03.2010.