Sins of colonial powers can be washed away

Despite the Japanese government's initial denials and evasive responses to accusations of wrongdoing, the Korean comfort victims continue to campaign for justice. In the colonial arena too, people have been struggling to cope with the recent history and attempting to tackle the situation politically. The "comforted" in both cases care little about these struggles because they are quite comfortable now.

Last October, a resolution was passed by the U.S. Senate which acknowledged the Jan. 17, 1893 usurpation of Hawaii as an illegal act and expressed the regret of the House later. This was not exactly an act of apology as such; neither did it contain any reparations to redress the grievances of the native Hawaiians for the loss of their land, resources and independence. Even then empty apology was stymied by the House later.

Also last October, Emperor Akihito of Japan merely "deplored" the Japanese occupation of China in 1931-35 which killed millions of Chinese.

Last month, 40 years after Japan's surrender, new Prime Minister Morishita Etsunori Hosokawa spoke more bluntly than past government leaders about Japan's "World War II aggression." He offered his "humble condolences" to "victims in neighboring countries of Asia and around the world." Touching on another era of aggression, just before the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of America, Pope John Paul commented to reporters on his way to the Dominican Republic that European explorers committed sins while colonizing the Western hemisphere. But he hailed the spreading of Christianity as "one of the great events in history."

In June, French President Francois Mitterrand visited Vietnam, the country ruled by France for nearly a century until 1954. "Taking a fresh look" at the nine-year war between Vietnamese nationalists and the French colonial forces, he said: "I always said this war, a war between France and Vietnam, was a mistake. It was wrong.

These are all evasive and amoral disclaimers, not responsibility. Repealing apologies. "Regret," "deplor," "sorry" are different from "apology."

A true apology should include repentance of the victimizer and seeking of the victim's forgiveness. You need some extraordinary moral courage to see your wrongs, spiritual wisdom to see the rights, political will to rectify the wrongs, and solemn undertaking not to repeat them ever.

The colonial powers have to face the judgment of the world community and pay for their mistake.

First, they must agree to the formation of an international commission on the destruction and damages of colonialism. They must cooperate with the respective victims and this commission in the fact-finding mission and the preparation of a report for the world community.

Second, they must render an unconditional apology for their colonial atrocities and ask for forgiveness from their victims. Third, they must pay reparations to the affected people in cash, kind and training. They may undertake sister towns/cities projects and contribute to rebuilding the victim country. They may open up their borders for their victims to engage freely in trade and commerce, exchange programs and employment schemes.

They should rewrite history in such a way that it addresses the truth, acknowledges wrongs, and accommodates victims' grievances. They should open up new communication channels to understand the cultural and historical heritage of their victims.

They must undertake legally and morally not to commit this crime any more. Until then the world will continue to be a calamity as it is today. There can be no peace without justice.

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