Japan-Korea: History as a Tool for Reconciliation?

Dr. Lionel Babicz
The University of Sydney

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This presentation examines the weight of history in present-day Japanese-Korean relations, and argues that far from being an obstacle to be overcome, the past can be part of the solution. Two main approaches could contribute to transform history into a tool for reconciliation. First, creating a “big history,” i.e. a single, grand and intelligible narrative, of the whole Japanese-Korean past could allow to emphasise the extraordinary achievements of the Korean and Japanese civilisations, which have managed to survive and maintain a distinct identity in the shadow of China, while also developing rich and complex bilateral ties. Second, comparing with other former colonial couples, such as France-Algeria, could allow to highlight colonial and post-colonial commonalities and differences, and deal with painful memories in a less impassioned manner.