

Thoughts on Recent Japan-Korea Relations and Japan-Korea Friendship Efforts

I would like to introduce the organization *Danryū* (literally “Warm Currents”) to readers. Recognized as a non-profit organization (NPO) in April 2013, the organization was first established in December 2009 through the activity of exchanging hand-written letters with the aim of improving Japan-Korea relations while having fun, as well as engaging in cultural and intellectual exchange removed from politics and religion. Aided by the popularity of the Korean boom, our friendship efforts – while small in scale – have managed to progress smoothly and led to the formation of new friendships.

In Japan, our activities encompass the following:

- Hold a history study group to learn about the history of the Korean islands from ancient times to present-day
- A walking group in which members explore areas of relevance to Korea
- Organize a lecture group in which Korean specialists from various fields give lectures (17 lectures held so far)
- A Korean culture group in which we learn about kim chi and pojagi
- A concert group with plays and concerts featuring traditional culture and K-pop

In Korea, the activities include:

- The Japan-Korean friendship and exchange exhibition and cultural exchange group which held an exhibition featuring work created by members of the Japanese and Korean branches
- Translating and publishing a novel about the life of Yi San-pyeong, the founder of Arita ware (selected as a distinguished book of 2015)
- A Japanese fashion show co-organized with the Seoul Facilities Corporation featuring *Danryū* members as models

In addition, we have had the fortune of receiving financial support from Setagaya ward as well as held activities at Setagaya International Messe. In the midst of these feelings of achievement (and personal satisfaction), a sudden shift in the tides has led to a sharp distancing from Korea, to the extent that the phrase “Japan-Korea friendship” now feels empty.

What was the cause, what should *Danryū* do?

From what has been made known, it would seem that the abolishment of the Japan-Korea

agreement on the comfort women issue (of December 28, 2015) by President Moon Jae-In and the decision by the Supreme Court of Korea in the case regarding forced labour which in turn led to the Japanese government's decision to remove Korea from the white list of trusted trading partners has brought about the current situation. It is incorrect to consider this a problem between Japan and Korea, and it is rather necessary to keep in mind the hegemony of the US and China. Owing to both the author's as well as space limitations, this essay will only discuss the case regarding forced labour, and focus on Japan-Korea relations and *Danryū*. I would also like to focus broadly only on facts concerning the problematic Japan-Korea relationship.

Japan colonized and governed the Korean Peninsula for about 35 years, since the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty of 1910 (signed on August 22, 1910) up until the instrument of surrender was signed by the Government-General of Korea on September 9, 1945. On June 22, 1965, the Treaty of Basic Relations between Japan and Republic of Korea and Agreement between Japan and the Republic of Korea Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims Economic Co-operation were established, setting up the formalization of relations between the two countries.

The terms of the agreements above were geared towards enhancing diplomatic relations and economic cooperation, with the agreement regarding the settlements of problems in regard to property and claims addressing the following issues:

- The abolishment of property in Korea and investments in Korea made by Japan or Japanese individuals (at the time, excluding private property belonging to the governor-general or army, this amounted to 4.7 billion yen, Korea's national budget was 350 million dollars (126 billion yen), and Japan's foreign exchange reserves were approximately 1.7 billion dollars (612 billion yen))
- The provision of 300 million dollars in aid (108 billion yen), a long-term, low interest loan of 200 million dollars (72 billion yen) (Article 1)
- To provide the confirmation of final and absolute solutions for claim disputes (Article 2)
- Any conflicts or disagreements arising from the interpretation or actualization of the agreement should be settled through diplomatic means, and when agreement is not possible a decision should be made by a committee consisting of two arbitrators – one arbitrator chosen from the government of each country – or three arbitrators, in which case the government of a third country would chose the third arbitrator (Article 3).

Let's take a look at the Korean government's response to the case of the forced labourers. In accordance with the agreement regarding settlements, Park Chung-hee spent 300 million dollars on developing industries and managing inflation, and nine years later in 1974 established the law of an individual's rights to file a claim against Japan. From 1975 to 1977, 300,000 won was paid individually to 8552 individuals who had died from forced labour and 74,963 bonds of 6.6 billion won awarded, making a total of 9.182 billion in payments (approximately 5.4% of the 300 million dollars in payouts). However, in 2012 Roh Moo-hyun argued that Park Chung-hee's government did not provide sufficient compensation for the victims, and paid an additional 633 million won (20 million won of which went to each deceased/missing individual, a maximum payout of 20 million won for individuals who were injured, and annual payments of 800,000 won to survivors for medical support).

Based on research conducted by Lee Woo-youn at the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research in Korea, I will next examine the issue of conscription. Hiring operations by Japan for workers in the coal mines and munitions factories lasted for approximately 6 years (September 1939 to February 1945), and recruitment efforts (September 1939 to February 1942) were mostly concentrated in the southern areas of Gyeongsang-do, Jeolla-do and Chungcheon-do, with "voluntary" and "conscription" recruitment in order taking place (September 1944 to March 1945). The nature of recruitment was similar to a standard corporation, and the person-in-charge was a manager from a corporation. However, most of the workers were not recruited by the company but rather by districts allotted by the government-general, and general recruitment was conducted as part of the administrative duties of the district head. Money was provided to come to Japan, and about 40% of the workers who came voluntarily ended up evading their duties and working at regular companies. Conscription by warrant started in September 1944 and ran for 6 months until March 1945. It was possible to refuse conscription but the financial and social support one would receive from it was much better than that of voluntary conscription. In the same period of September 1939 to February 1945 during which recruitment was carried out, the number of workers at regular companies – excluding deserters – rose to 1.7 million. Although there were many young people who were drawn to Japan with promises of a higher income and new civilization, most of them did not want to work at the mines or munition factories which required manpower.

Next, let's analyze the unpaid (uncollected) money towards the Korean labourers.

The Korean labourers did not have to pay for rent or public utilities, were provided with cheap meals, and lived in accommodation provided and overseen by Koreans. In order to prevent inflation they received only a small sum of their salaries, and excluding in-company saving schemes the rest of their money was forcefully stored in the post office. They were not able to withdraw this money until they returned to Korea upon the completion of their contracts. The corporation had to inform government offices (district, police, etc) of the number of Korean labourers, the amount of savings, money sent over as well as money paid in salaries every month. After the war, the number of labourers that remained was 320,000 (including deserters). However, there remains unpaid/uncollected money (consisting of salary, pension funds (borne by company), etc) for the period of July 25 to August 15 for those who returned to Korea. In 1946, the Japanese government made each company calculate the costs of unpaid funds to Korean workers (documents regarding these calculations exist, but as they pertain to individual matters have not been made public), and the amount of money to be paid decided in court.

To conclude, let's have a look at court cases involving forced labourers. The October 30, 2018 lawsuit by forced labourers has its roots in 1997.

On December 24, 1997, Yeo Woon-taek and Shin Cheon-sun brought a case against Nippon Steel requesting reparations for forced and slave labour to the Osaka courts. However, they lost the case (March 27, 2001). In addition, the Osaka high and supreme courts both rejected the appeals for the case (November 19, 2002, October 9, 2003).

Following this, on February 28, 2005 Lee Choon-sik and Kim Gyu-su also joined the suit, and the four plaintiffs made an appeal to the Seoul Central District Court. However, this also ended in defeat (April 3, 2008), and the case was also dismissed by the upper courts (July 16, 2009). However, at the supreme court this decision was reversed (May 24, 2012). The supreme court issued a different verdict than their initial one, and ordered Nippon Steel to pay 100 million won in damages to each plaintiff (July 10, 2013). This was the final decision issued by the supreme court (October 30, 2018).

In response to the decision given by the Supreme Court of Korea the Japanese government placed restrictions on exports from Korea, to which Korea responded by boycotting Japanese products, as such worsening the relationship between both countries. I believe that it is especially in times like these that we need civil exchanges. There will always be

gloom and darkness, but I believe that there are bright days ahead, and I want to continue pushing for Japan-Korea friendship efforts.

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