The Fabrication of "Forced Conscription"

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Korean resident "victims" theory disgraceful

Interviewer: The "forced conscription" of Koreans appears in the majority of Japanese middle and high school textbooks today and the same is even set in the exams of the National Center for University Entrance Examination as established historical fact. Further the term "Korean residents" is explained to mean these victims of "forced conscription" in the context of the issues of foreigners rights to take up public service jobs and vote in local elections.

Whilst in one sense debates on "forced conscription" are advanced as if the concept were a major and self-evident premise, amidst this Professor Chung's newly published book *Korean residents in Japan: The myth of forced conscription* [Zainichi Kyosei Renko no Shinwa] (Bunshun Shinsho) has upset the status quo by pointing out that the "forced conscription" of Korean residents is a myth.

It was in this context that we invited Professor Chung to speak on the currently asserted "forced conscription" theory and its connection to Korean residents and further on the problems inherent in the "forced conscription" theory that become apparent from that connection.

Professor Chung: It is acceptable to think of the use of the term "forced conscription" as having gradually widened after being sparked by the 1965 publication of *A chronicle of the forced conscription of Koreans* [Chosenjin Kyosei Renko no Kiroku] by Park Kyongsik, a Korean resident. The term itself was not coined by Park. However, this book, which had been authored by a Korean resident provided those Japanese in favor of apologizing for the war with a sense of mission. In fact, it has taken on biblical significance for these pro-apology Japanese. However, I think that, from the perspective of Korean residents, there was a feeling that this book by Park had done something disgraceful. Saying that their presence in Japan is entirely due to forced conscription carried out by the war time Japanese is a persuasive story that the thinking elite amongst Korean residents use from time to time to silence the current generation of Japanese. I think Korean residents had a sense that this sort of idea should not, by rights, be used lightly and that even if it were an argument used in speech it would be wrong to use it in writing.

Today however, forty years on from these events, making statements such as those of Park has, on the contrary, somehow become the standard for Korean residents. Since when we speak of Koreans residents these days, the majority of the first generation have already passed away, few are left who actually experienced the time of the voyage to Japan. This means that, as with the Japanese, Korean residents are also learning their history through the media and education. In other words, they are formulating their own images not through the actual experiences of their parents and grandparents, but through learning the images of Korean residents depicted by the media and other sources.

Interviewer: The forced conscription theory is told in the media and emphasis is given to Korean residents being victims.

Professor Chung: Yes and not only this but examining the discourse on forced conscription it is often the case that it is not Korean residents themselves who are relating that they are the victims of forced conscription or descendants of the same. I touch on this on page 27 in my book. The Korean resident victims theory is taken at face value and believed by more Japanese than Korean residents here and by more westerners than Japanese. It is the custom for Korean residents to be living witnesses telling of Japan's crimes as a nation. There are two quotations at the beginning of my book relating to the fact that in America and other places the Korean resident victims theory is referred to as soon as Japan's ethnic problems are mentioned.

However it is the first generation Korean residents themselves who know best of all that they are not the victims of forced conscription. The first generation comprises those who have been able to tell their own stories by comparing themselves to their friends and acquaintances in their hometowns. "Why am I living in a strange land while my friends stayed in my hometown?" This is no doubt because the person made a decision due to some circumstance or another to journey to Japan or because the person, for some reason, chose to remain in Japan rather than return home. In other words, the first generation feels that to agree to the proposition that they live in Japan entirely due to forced conscription by pre-war Japanese, would be to show contempt for their own existence. We can expect that it would differ from the memories carved deeply into their minds and bodies.

However, whether for better or worse, those who recorded the stories of the first generation were not themselves first generation but a subsequent 1.5 generation. By "1.5 generation" I mean those who accompanied their parents to Japan in childhood. Park fits into this group. Whilst the first generation were not blessed with educational opportunities, this 1.5 generation did enjoy educational opportunities in Japan, so it is only natural that from amongst them should emerge some who recorded their parents' stories. The problem is that the first generation was largely unable to read the forced conscription theory written down by this 1.5 generation, and even if they had been able to read it, the problem would never have been pointed out. No doubt it was due to circumstances such as these that we have reached the present day with the forced conscription theory still at large.

No "forced conscription" in the oral accounts

Interviewer: Turning to an examination of what the first generation experienced, you quote a variety of oral accounts in your book from a report published in 1988 by the Youth Association of Korean Residents Union in Japan (*Mindan*), *Tell me about that day, Father*：*The movement to restore the history of Korean residents in Japan* [Apogi, Kikasete, Ano Hi no Koto o: Wareware no Rekishi o Torimodosu Undo].

Professor Chung: This report is from the time of the textbook dispute of 1982 when a fact-finding survey was conducted of first generation Korean residents, with a total of 1106 sending in some sort of response. There are other compilations of oral accounts, however I raise this one as it persuasive due to the research having been undertaken by Korean residents themselves.

What has great significance are the words of the editor at the beginning of the chapter entitled "Reasons for coming to Japan";

> Japan was embroiled in war through the conflict between Japan and China that began in 1937. Whilst the Pacific War commenced in 1941, Japan had used Korea as a labor supply source since the Manchurian Incident, seeking out massive labor and military forces from that country. This gave rise to the order for what is known as "forced conscription" of the citizenry, which continued unabated to the end of the war. The

> method used was to drive a truck into a village when peasants were resting at lunch, threaten them with bayonets and to take them away by force (*omitted*).

In other words, the editor summed up matters by saying that violent forced conscription took place and that Korean residents were the victims of the same.

However if we examine the oral accounts contained in the report, there are almost no accounts of the kind the editor was anticipating.

Certainly we can discern that that they were thrown into factories in a foreign country and forced to do hard labor, however there are almost no accounts of actual "conscription" such as driving a truck into a village, threatening people with bayonets and taking them away by force.

Admiration for Japan

Professor Chung: The most common motivation for coming to Japan can probably be explained in terms of economic conditions: poverty and hardship. There are, for example, oral accounts like the following:

> "We were so poor, always fighting. I came here because I couldn't go on. Even if you got a job all you could eat was rice bran, pumpkin or radish leaf dishes. I had nothing to give my little brother and nothing myself. There was nothing but this miserable life for me in Korea so I came to Japan."

> "The crops had failed for about 4 years and there was nothing I could do about that. I came to Japan because I couldn't eat in Korea. My parents were in Hiroshima at the time. They didn't want me to come to Japan but I couldn't eat at home so I came to Japan without telling my father.

There are also those who relate that they came to Japan seeking to create wealth or admired Japan:

> "Life was hard and we peasants were limited by having to farm small lots.. In the circumstances I was jealous of the way the Japanese lived and

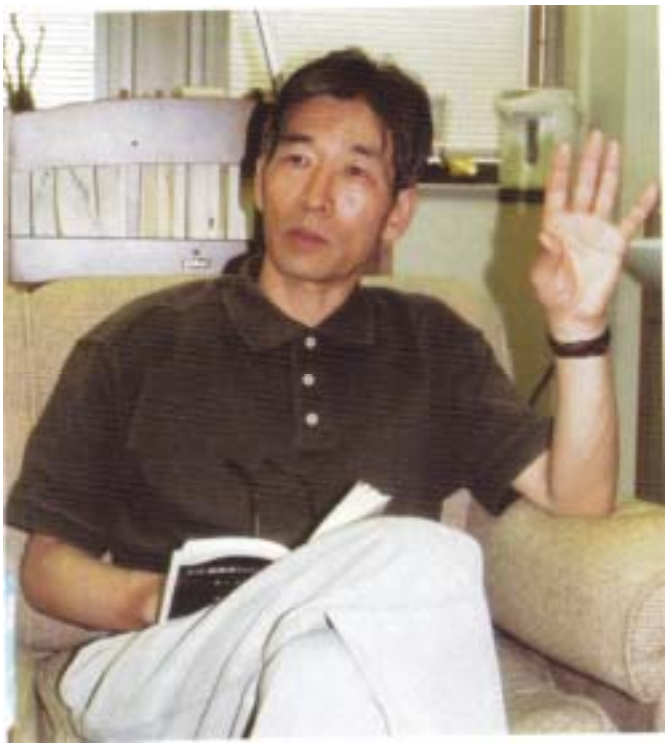
> decided to go to Japan, so I had the Principal at my school give me sponsoring certification and came to Japan on the pretext of getting a higher education. It was difficult to come to Japan at the time. There were quite a number, even in my village, who were wanting to go to Japan because life was hard, but their sponsor's credentials were not recognised and it seems they never came.
>
> "I came to Japan on my own. Someone I knew in Korea used to talk about Japan often so I admired the country.

Interviewer: What we can draw from these oral accounts is that, whilst there were various reasons such as poverty or wealth creation, they made their own choices to come to Japan, is it not?

Professor Chung: That's right. It's not so much as they were forcibly conscripted but that there is even an account of a person being assisted in their journey by the Japanese police, who were said to have been responsible for forced conscription at the grassroots level. That person said the following:

> Korea was in deep recession. There were 2 lessons of roughly 2 hours each week at school on the Korean language (using Korean language readers). The school Principal was Japanese, the other teachers were Korean. I had a station sergeant from Kagoshima Prefecture who was posted to Chollanamdo Sungjyu-kun, accompany me to Shimonoseki.

If we look at it this way, you could even say that there are no accounts that lead to "forced conscription". Whilst editor of this report supposes accounts of forced conscription and seeks to wrap things up by saying that the Korean residents are the victims of the same, a number of conflicting arguments have arisen from those who gave the accounts. This trend is a special characteristic of not only this report but also a point held in common by almost all the documents collating these kinds of accounts. This means the forcible removal by truck story told by the editor, is, in the end, something not learned through this kind of fact-finding survey but something read in books and appropriately seen as discourse.



However it is the first generation Korean residents themselves who know best of all that they are not the victims of forced conscription. The first generation comprises those who have been able to tell their own stories by comparing themselves to their friends and acquaintances in their hometowns. "Why am I living in a strange land while my friends stayed in my hometown?" This is no doubt because the person made a decision due to some circumstance or because the person, *for some reason, chose to remain in Japan rather than return home.*

The push – pull perspective

Interviewer: Even so it is very interesting that when the people of the Korean peninsular thought of making money, they headed for Japan and not for Seoul, isn't it?

Professor Chung: That is an important point. It was by no means unnatural that there was a flow of people from Korea to Japan at the time. The people of Korea were citizens of Japan just like the Japanese and even in terms of distance, the

distance from southern Korea to Seoul and to Kyushu barely differ. In fact if one lives near Pusan one can see Tsushima.

Further, there were Japanese people in the Korean peninsula at the time. Whilst some among them were, no doubt, up to no good, there were quite a few who were held in appropriate esteem and respect by the Koreans. There were interpersonal relationships of all descriptions between ethnic Japanese and Koreans. So it was quite predictable that Koreans would want to start their lives over in Japan when they sought to escape their poverty.

What is more, the period of Japanese Empire was a time when peoples' lives, including their economic activity and education were centrally controlled in Tokyo. So, rather than it being strange it was actually natural that young Koreans should aspire towards the mainland.

When we speak of human migration the classic, commonsense approach is to consider it from both the 'push' factors, or impetus and 'pull' factors or enticements and it is useless to consider the history of Korean migration to Japan without looking at the main reasons compelling Koreans to leave their homeland and those drawing them, at the same time, towards Japan. In this context there is quite a deal of overlap between the motivations of the Japanese who immigrated to South America after the war, the "newcomer" Koreans who came to Japan from the latter part of the 1980s and the Koreans who came to Japan in the pre-war wave of immigration. This means there is no reason to treat the fact of coming to Japan as something special. On the contrary, taking a universal perspective should also make it easier to understand Korean residents.

Morita Yoshio thoroughly researched the push and pull factors for those who voyaged to Japan from Korea before the war in his 1955 work, *The treatment of Korean residents: transitions and situation today* [*Zainichi chosenjin shogu no suii to genjo*] (Legal Training and Research Institute).

According to Morita's work, the first push factor was the increase in the Korean population. The population of Korea increased greatly through annexation with Japan. Whilst this rapid population increase occurred amongst the peasants of southern Korea the productivity of their farming land did not increase and their livelihoods became extremely strained.

On the other hand, the main pull factor, the Japanese mainland was in a period of capitalist growth and Koreans were in demand as a labor force. The mainland was close in terms of distance and there were jobs in cities, factories and mines. Going to Japan would put food on the table and the voyage was cheap. The Japanese mainland thus became a place where the population growth on the Korean peninsular would be absorbed and the Koreans made the journey.

Moreover, there were a great variety of interpersonal relationships between Koreans and Japanese and if one considers that the mainland was not only the center of economic activity but also of education and other attractions, when people living in the southern part of the Korean peninsular decided to make a new start for economic and other reasons, the place that offered them the opportunity was not Seoul, but the Japanese mainland.

Wartime mobilization due to being Japanese citizens

Interviewer: I think it is clear from both the history of Korean settlement in Japan and the first generation accounts you have just mentioned that the claim that Korean residents are the victims of "forced conscription" is completely fictitious. However do you not also feel that the term "forced conscription" itself must be challenged?

Professor Chung: The term "forced conscription" is used as if it refers to a specific historical event that occurred at a specific time, however, it is actually a vaguely defined term. Some use it to indicate all Koreans who came to Japan during the period of annexation, some commentators use it to mean the recruitment drive that began as wartime mobilization in 1939 and others say that the use of the term should be limited to the conscription that occurred from September 1944.

Whilst these various theories exist, generally speaking it is commonly used to indicate wartime labor mobilization. This being the case the term "forced conscription" is definitely odd. It exaggerates Japanese culpability and Korean suffering.

It is an exaggeration because, at the time, Korea was part of the Japanese Empire and ethnic Koreans were part of the Japanese citizenry and further, because there were no able-bodied people loafing about amusing themselves in Japan during the war.

As the war dragged on and military conscription expanded the labor supply grew scarce. The distribution of the labor force was regulated in order to compensate and mobilization was intensified. Against this backdrop I think it is true that Koreans mobilized from the Korean peninsular were sent to sub-standard work sites, forced to do hard labor and discriminated against in terms of food and wages in some cases.

However, having said that, Japanese men were sent to war and ethnic Koreans took their places in the workforce. My view is that in comparison to being sent to a battlefield as a soldier, being sent to a coal mine or construction site cannot be called “unreasonable” or “unfair”.

What we have to keep hold of here is that, at the time, whether Korean or Japanese, all citizens were expected to serve their country and that many people participated and were subject to that expectation. If this was “unreasonable” then that is the case not only for ethnic Koreans but for all Japanese citizens and it should be referred to as a fate imposed jointly on all Japanese citizens.

Beyond the fabricated story

Interviewer: The idea that the Japanese were wrongdoers and the Koreans were victims from the beginning is bound up in the term “forced conscription”. Further, the term itself acts to deny the existence of issues such as those you have just pointed out on the commonality of Koreans being Japanese citizens just like the Japanese and the factual reality of Korean settlement.

Professor Chung: It is plainly misleading to use the term “forced conscription” to emphasize that the Koreans were victims and the Japanese were wrongdoers.

Looking at how this situation arose, the 1965 publication of *A Chronicle of the forced conscription of Koreans* [Chosenjin Kyosei Renko no Kiroku] by Park Kyongsik was significant. This work is regarded as the classic theory on Korean

residents, however it is dubious in its methodology and further, although its writing was clearly politically motivated from the outset, almost no-one pointed these things out.

I do raise these matters in *Korean residents in Japan: The myth of forced conscription* and a reading soon reveals that Park's book was published immediately prior to the conclusion of normalization talks between Japan and South Korea and that Park took a position in opposition to the conclusion of the talks. In other words, Park felt that the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea would be a restoration of the Japanese imperialism and the publication of the book was intended to prevent that restoration. As Park was, at the time, a history professor at Chosun University, which educated the elite of the pro-North Korean group in Japan, The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon), it is arguable that the forced conscription claims are a perfect reflection of the Chongryon position.

However I feel that this was not the only motivation. I am referring to the North Korean repatriation, with which you are familiar and which began in 1959 and came to a peak in 1960 and 1961 before declining rapidly. There is tremendous significance in the fact that this book appeared during this period.

What I am referring to is that during the repatriation campaign Chongryon was actively promoting the necessity for Korean residents of Japan to return to participate in rebuilding their homeland. In other words Chongryon was arguing that Korean residents should leave Japan. When, however, people did return to North Korea, any illusions they had were instantly destroyed and this led to the sudden decline in the number of those repatriated.

It was at this point that it became necessary to create a basis for Korean residents to remain in Japan and not return home. This was the time when the book stressing that Korean residents had been brought to Japan through "forced conscription" appeared.

Interviewer: Naturally the "forced conscription" theory portrayed the Japanese as wrongdoers and the Koreans as victims.

Professor Chung: Yes, as I said at the outset, the first generation, who came to Japan by choice felt it disgraceful to take an attitude that capitalized on their suffering and so "forced conscription" was, at first, no more than a specialized term used by the left wing, not a term in popular use.

However when we finally reached the 1980s, the Japanese mass media reported on Japan's state crimes during the Second World War and discrimination against Korean residents became topical, the term "forced conscription" became suddenly popular. Whilst the 1980's were a period when the school textbooks affair became a diplomatic issue between Japan and South Korea, the fingerprinting system for Korean residents was also taken up by the media and the spike in interest in Korea accompanying the Seoul Olympics meant a popularisation of interest in Korea itself. The Korean studies experts who guided this interest were largely from the left wing and it was they who spread the use of the term "forced conscription". It subsequently became a keyword used frequently and without compunction whenever Japan's oppression of her neighbouring countries is discussed, not only in Japan but also in Asia and the west.

My book is a critique of Park's *Chronicle*. I wrote it, rather, to rehabilitate the work of Morita, whose work Park criticized. It follows on from my work *The end of the Korean residents in Japan* published three years ago by Bunshun Shinsho as my second treatise on the topic. Whilst my own view is that *The end* is a ground-breaking work on Korean residents, however unfortunately it has not been widely read. In other words it has not had the full impact it could have. One cannot influence people unless they buy and read one's work. Unless the progressive left-wingers too feel they have to read it then it will be difficult to dispel the image of Korean residents as being victims of forced conscription. I'd like you ask your readers to at least read this latest work of mine, both for my sake and also for the sake of Japan's honor.

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