

2014.02.02 (Sun)

Japan's Annexation of Korea Given High Marks by Prominent British Scholar Sakurai Yoshiko

As China and South Korea persist in denouncing Japan's view of its war-time history, I continue to firmly believe that historical facts are our mightiest and most reliable ally.

I was strongly reminded again of that when I recently came across an edition of *The New Korea* (E. P. Dutton & Company, New York; 1926) by Alleyne Ireland, a British Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and leading expert on colonial policies in East Asia during the early 20th century.

Originally published in 1926, the particular edition I read is a bilingual version recently reprinted by Sakuranohana Shuppan Publications Inc., Tokyo.

Ireland had earlier published three volumes on colonial administration in the Far East, touching on Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the US. Why was he interested in Japan's rule over Korea? Ireland explains it was because Korea "presents the rare spectacle of a civilized race ruling another civilized race..."

"It is true that at the time Japan annexed Korea, in 1910, the actual conditions of life in the peninsula were extremely bad," he notes. However, he does not attribute it to the inferiority of the Korean race, writing that it was largely due to "the stupidity and corruption which for five hundred years had, almost continuously, characterized the government of the Korean dynasty" and to "the existence ... of a royal court which maintained ... a system of licensed cruelty and corruption."

Ireland makes it a point to assume a strictly objective viewpoint in reviewing Japan's rule, explaining he did his best to stay away from arguments of imperialism versus nationalism, instead focusing on "the aims, the methods, and the results of Japanese administration in Korea." He explains that the title of his book "gives the key to its contents."

The book leaves a number of strong impressions on the reader. For one, Ireland gives high marks in general to Japan's rule over Korea. Most Japanese today tend to look back on the Korean annexation with a sense of guilt. However, there are scholars from third countries who, while stringently acknowledging the blemishes, interpret Japan's rule over Korea quite differently from the stereotypical notion of it having been "a dark era for Korea marked by violence and exploitation," as we Japanese have been taught in our post-war school curriculum.

Large Number of Korean Students Studying in Pre-War Japan

Ireland, for one, writes about Makoto Saito, who served as the third (1919-1927) and fifth (1929-1931) governor-general in Korea, as follows:

“All sincere and humane colonial governors—none is more worthy of such a description than is Viscount Saito, Governor-General of Korea since 1919.”

What prompted Ireland to evaluate Saito as so “sincere and humane”? To begin, Ireland credits Saito—despite an attempt on his life right after assuming his post—with having resolutely pursued reforms without taking a heavy hand, implementing, among other things, “the speedy disappearance of countless swords and uniforms” that had previously characterized the Japanese colonial regime. Ireland also praises Saito for his unstinting efforts in improving education as well as for the promotion of effective government at the local level.

I believe we can regard *JAPAN IN KOREA: Japan’s Fair and Moderate Colonial Policy (1910-1945) and Its Legacy on South Korea’s Developmental Miracle* (Soshisha Publishing Co., Tokyo; 2013) by George Akita, Emeritus Professor of the University of Hawaii, as an extension of Ireland’s research. Professor Akita himself favorably assesses Japanese rule over Korea, concluding that it “can be judged as being ‘almost fair’” in comparison with the other colonial powers of the same period.

Among Saito’s many accomplishments, Professor Akita credits him with having adjusted the wages of Korean bureaucrats, reorganized and expanded the police force, abolished the unpopular gendarmerie (“kempeitai”) system, opened provincial governorships to civil officials, instituted educational reforms, and permitted the printing of vernacular newspapers and journals.

Rhee Yong-hoon, professor of economic history at Seoul National University, has written extensively on some of the same points raised by Akita. In *The Story of the Republic of Korea: Korean History Textbooks Must Be Rewritten* (Bungei Shunju Ltd., Tokyo; 2009), Prof. Rhee points out:

“As regards education for the general populace in Korea during the 1920s, the colonial regime raised the school attendance rate of school-age children between 20 and 30% . . . (and) the rate exceeded 60% for boys toward the end of the 1930s.”

Prof. Rhee notes the number of Korean students studying in Japan by 1942 had increased drastically—to a total of 29,427, of whom 75% were middle school students, which he notes reflects a serious lack of institutions for higher learning in pre-war Korea.

He further points out that, in 2004, there were a total of 16,446 Korean junior, middle, and high school students studying away from their home country which by then had become dramatically affluent. When these figures are compared, one is surprised by the great number of Korean students who had left Korea under Japanese rule to study in Japan. That shows precisely how much emphasis Japan placed on improvement of Korean education.

While the people of the peninsula have accused Japan of stealing Korean farmland, Ireland observes that the government-general actually rented uncultivated state land to tenant farmers “on easy terms” and, when their reclamation had been effected, transferred them “gratis to the cultivators.” Ireland adds that the government-general further assisted farmers to own cultivated lands “by allowing the purchase price to be paid in ten annual installments,”

Needed: Dispassionate View of History

Prof. Rhee also has scrutinized the land issue. Closely examining Korean land registries, Rhee notes he has found not a single case of plundering by the Japanese, concluding that land acquisition in Korea was done “fairly” by the colonial regime.

On his part, Ireland emphasizes that the land reform implemented by the Japanese was aimed at helping poor tenant farmers, noting: “I have formed the opinion that Korea today is infinitely better governed than it ever was under its own native rulers, that it is better governed than most self-governing countries . . . (the government-general) having in view as well the cultural and economic development of the people as the technique of administration.”

When discussing Japanese colonial rule over Korea positively, as I am, one is sure to invariably draw a bitter rebuttal claiming that, regardless of whether there may have been some merit in Japanese administration, colonial rule was wrong in the first place and that Japan’s rule over Korea was hardly acceptable.

Such a contention sounds reasonable. And yet, I am afraid it will fall short of enabling one to come to terms with why Japan had to set about annexing Korea—i.e., why Korea was annexed. Ireland lists two factors as the causes of the Korean Peninsula becoming a menace to Japan:

- Centuries of misrule by the Rhee Dynasty had reduced Korea to a condition from which it was hopeless to maintain independence; and,
- As a result, Russia or China might take possession of the Korean peninsula, creating a strategic situation intolerable in terms of Japan’s national defense.

The above view, as stated in a book written nearly a century ago, reflects the thinking of the international community at the time. In order not to repeat the same mistake, we Japanese must naturally learn from history, as President Park Geun-hye has repeatedly pointed out since assuming office in February 2013. That is why nothing is more vital than dispassionately viewing the past within the framework of the prevailing values of those times.

(Translated from “Renaissance Japan” column no. 591 in the January 23, 2014 issue of The Weekly Shincho)

THE NEW KOREA

コリア とき
朝鮮が劇的に豊かになった時代

日英対訳

植民地研究の第一人者 アレン・アイルランドの 日韓併合分析

豊富な体験と知識とによって忘れられた 20 世紀初頭の朝鮮半島の真実が、語られている。一級資料としての価値が非常に高く、日韓国民の友好の示唆に溢れている。知識人必読の書である。

桜の花出版編集部

PREFACE

About twenty years ago I published three volumes dealing with colonial administration in the Far East. They related to British rule in Burma, the Federated Malay States, the Straits Settlements, Sarawak, British North Borneo, and Hong Kong, American rule in the Philippines, Dutch rule in Java, and French rule in Indo-China.

It had been my intention to include an account of Japanese rule in Formosa; but by the time I had turned back east after two years of westerly travel the Russo-Japanese war was in progress, and a visit to Formosa was out of the question. When, in 1922, the opportunity presented itself to spend the greater part of the year in the Far East, I decided that a volume describing Japanese administration in Korea would make a more interesting contribution to the study of Government than a similar work about Formosa.

Formosa is merely one example among many of a civilized race ruling a people in a very low stage of development. Korea, on the other hand, presents the rare spectacle of one civilized race ruling another civilized race. It is true that at the time Japan annexed Korea, in 1910, the actual conditions of life in the Peninsula were extremely bad. This was not due, however, to any lack of inherent intelligence and ability in the Korean race, but to the stupidity and corruption which for five hundred years had, almost continuously, characterized the government of the Korean dynasty,

and to the existence during that period of a royal court which maintained throughout Korea a system of licensed cruelty and corruption.

Such was the misrule under which the Koreans had suffered for generation after generation that all incentive to industry, thrift, and social progress had been destroyed, because none of the common people had been allowed to enjoy the fruits of their own efforts.

The title of the present volume gives the key to its contents. What I have attempted is to present in some detail the aims, the methods, and the results of Japanese administration in Korea. Of the right of the Koreans to govern themselves, of the right of the Japanese to govern them I have said but little, for the subject has been discussed exhaustively by other writers, both from the point of view of the Korean nationalists and from that of the Japanese imperialists, and is in any case of such a nature that a judgment one way or the other can reflect nothing but the individual temperament of the judge.

There is already in existence a voluminous literature relating to Korea, much of it of great interest and importance. Most of it, however, falls under one of two heads—writing descriptive of the country and of the people, or polemical writing in which Japanese administration in Korea is attacked or eulogized on the basis of material specially selected to serve one purpose or the other.

To the English-reading public there is available at present only one source of statistically-based information covering every phase of Japanese rule in Korea—the *Annual Report on Reforms and Progress in Chosen*,

compiled and published by the Government-General. Although these reports contain a great deal of valuable comment and a considerable body of statistical data, a careful perusal of the volumes covering the past ten years convinced me that a work such as I had in mind could not be written from that material alone. It was clear that a good deal of the matter appearing in the reports had been condensed from departmental reports in which various subjects had been treated in full detail. Both as to data and to comment a large proportion of the contents of the present volume is taken from translations of official material which has not hitherto been accessible in English.

Where I have expressed my own opinion of Japanese administration in Korea, it has been derived from the consideration of what I saw in the country, what I have read about it in official and in unofficial publications, and from discussions with persons—Japanese, Korean, and foreign—who were living in the Peninsula at the time of my visit.

ALLEYNE IRELAND.

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