

## BOOK REVIEW BY MATSUKI KUNITOSHI

*Anti-Japanese Tribalism*

By Lee Yeong-hoon *et al.*

### **Conscientious scholars rise up**

At long last conscientious Korean historians have risen up to reveal the truth about their country's past. Since December 2018 six courageous scholars affiliated with the Nakseongdae Institute of Economic Research (whose president is Lee Yeong-hoon, Seoul National University emeritus professor) have broadcast 45 episodes of a lecture series exposing the falsification of postwar Korean history over the Lee Sung-man YouTube Channel. The broadcasts have focused on two main topics, which the authors cite as the source of the Korean crisis: anti-Japanese tribalism and the comfort-women dispute. Using primary, contemporaneous sources such as statistics and documentation, the authors refute the anti-Japanese historical perception embraced by Korean historians; their arguments are so logically sound that they leave absolutely no room for rebuttal.

Their lecture notes formed the basis of a book entitled *Anti-Japanese Tribalism: The Root of the Korean Crisis*, which came out in July 2019. Almost from the moment of its publication, the book became a bestseller; by the end of October more than 130,000 copies had been sold. No social science book has ever done so well in Korea. Its success has been likened to sales of 1,000,000 copies in Japan, once differences in reading habits and population are accounted for.

What Mr. Lee means by *tribalism* is South Korea's failure to form a civil society. In other words, Korean nationalism has not progressed beyond hostility between tribes in a world where only the strong survive. Korean anti-Japanese sentiment has no connection whatsoever with healthy nationalism; it is a tribalist sentiment that creates imaginary enemies of the Japanese. This is the world of shamanism and totemism, both of which are deep-rooted in the Korean culture. The authors see through this exceedingly unscientific, exclusive ideology that positions Japan as a nation of absolute evil (nation of demons), and Korea as one of absolute good (nation of angels).

If the book had been written by a Japanese, portions of it might be indirect or circumlocutory. But the authors of *Anti-Japanese Tribalism* mince no words; they say exactly what they mean and, as a consequence, their arguments are very persuasive. For instance, the Preface (entitled "A Nation of Lies") begins as follows:

It is an internationally well-known fact that Korea has a culture of lies. In 2014 1,400 persons were prosecuted for perjury, 172 times the Japanese equivalent (or 430 times, if population difference is taken into account). There were 1,250 times as many charges stemming from false accusations than in Japan. Insurance fraud is rampant; in 2014 total insurance fraud amounted to 4.5 trillion won, 100 times the US figure.

These figures alone give readers a clear picture of the nature of disputes between Japan and Korea.

Lee Yeong-hoon also writes about a Korean Supreme Court case in which the court ordered Nippon Steel to pay damages to former (allegedly exploited) conscripted workers in October 2018. Lee maintains that this was a civil case, pure and simple, and what really happened was that a Korean dormitory supervisor failed to hand over salary payments to Korean workers.

He adds, “I find it incredible that a case like this went all the way to the Supreme Court! Justices are not historians. They are only jurists who know nothing about the situation during the war.”

(...)

“It never occurred to them that the plaintiffs might be lying. After all, they’ve been taught nothing but lies since childhood.”

Lee’s logic is authoritative and irrefutable.

### **Authors are true patriots**

Lee Woo-youn, one of the contributors to *Anti-Japanese Tribalism*, holds a doctorate in economics, and has done exhaustive research on wartime conscripted workers. He heads a movement that opposes the placement of a statue commemorating such workers in front of the Japanese Consulate in Busan, and chairs the Alliance Against Anti-Japanese Tribalism as well. In response to an invitation from the International Research Institute of Controversial Histories (of which I am a member), Lee Woo-youn traveled to the United Nations Office at Geneva in July 2019. At a session of the UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Council) held there, the two of us delivered a speech that revealed the lies that have overshadowed the dispute about conscripted workers. Additionally, at an auxiliary event, Lee Woo-youn spoke about the wartime situation from the perspective of a Korean scholar. He thoroughly discredited the accusation that Korean workers were paid less than their Japanese colleagues or otherwise discriminated against, providing irrefutable, contemporaneous, official statistics and other pertinent information (for instance, dangerous tasks were not assigned to inexperienced Korean laborers).

Not long after Lee Woo-youn delivered his speeches, his countrymen subjected him to vicious insults and death threats. Upon his return home, the television network Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) branded him a traitor. Hoodlums stormed into his office, where they spat on him, screamed insults, and threatened him. Furthermore, he has been charged with a crime: joining with an enemy nation in a conspiracy against the Republic of Korea. For this crime there is only one punishment: death.

Lee Yeong-hoon, chairman of the Nakseongdae Institute, has also been the target of defamation lawsuits, and his fellow authors have been subjected to vehement invective of all sorts and threatened with legal action. It is very possible that their lives are in danger.

But they are not deterred in the least, because they are convinced that the Korean politics of lies, diplomacy of lies, and culture of lies have become so ingrained as to threaten the very survival of their nation. Far from traitors, they are patriots of the highest caliber.

It is obvious that the falsification of historical fact in the educational systems in place in both Japan and Korea during the postwar era has shaped the relationship between the two nations that we see today. The Koreans have contaminated their students with resentment against Japan, while the Japanese have instilled their students with a misguided sense of guilt toward Koreans. If this relationship is allowed to continue as it stands now, spiritual degeneration will lead both nations to ruin. To prevent such a fate, both Japanese and Koreans must reclaim their true history and take pride in the blood that courses in their veins — a gift from their ancestors.

The ancestors of today's Japanese were not aggressors. Nor did they abduct Koreans for any reason. The ancestors of today's Koreans were not so weak-willed as to stand by passively as their daughters or girlfriends were rounded up by Japanese military police and forced to become sex slaves. All of them were simply doing their best to fulfill their dreams of better lives for their parents and their children.

I am convinced that peace in the true sense of the word can be achieved between our two nations only if their citizens discard the history of lies and offer their appreciation to their ancestors for establishing a foundation for the prosperity we enjoy today.

To that end, I offer my fervent hope that *Anti-Japanese Tribalism*, a book that patriots risked their lives to write, reaches the widest possible audience in Japan and Korea.

Note: The Japanese version of this book was published by Bungei Shunju, Ltd. in November 2019. To date (December 2, 2019) 300,000 copies have been sold.