

Summary of “Japan’s Annexation of Korea: It was the Japanese People Who Were Forcibly Deprived”

By MATSUKI Kunitoshi

Mr. Matsuki’s essay dispels the myth that Korea was grievously harmed during Japanese-Korean annexation. Rather, Mr. Matsuki points out that Japan went out of her way to treat Korean culture with respect and encouraged its revival during the annexation period. Today Koreans have forgotten, either maliciously or through carelessness, that Japan, at great personal expense, laid the foundation for Korea to effectively compete with the modern world. The essay is referenced with primary source materials by which one can confirm that Japan had no ill intentions in the Korean Peninsula.

The effect of the outright rejection (or plain ignorance) of history “as it was” is the current anti-Japanese sentiment throughout Korea. Mr. Matsuki recounts his personal experiences with Korean anti-Japanese prejudice and prejudice openly expressed in the Korean media. Such racism is indeed encouraged throughout Korean society – even kindergarteners spontaneously express anti-Japanese hate. Such racisms would not only be unacceptable in Japan but anywhere in the world. Furthermore, Koreans appear to assume that the Japanese still have ill intentions towards Koreans – leading Koreans fear Japan more so than either North Korea or China. A clearer understanding of the past and rejection of their distorted remembrance is the way towards a true friendship between the two countries.

A thorough understanding of history, “as it was”, will begin with the dispelling of the myth of the “seven deprivations,” namely, “king, sovereignty, personal name, land, national language, resources, and human life”. In addition, Mr. Matsuki evaluates the so-called “comfort women” issue. Despite the clear evidence against these Korean myths, Japanese apologies and kowtowing in response to these will only aggravate tensions and not be a basis for long-lasting friendship between Korea and Japan.

As a step to normal bi-lateral relations, it is hoped that Korea recognizes Japan’s enormous economic and social contributions that brought the Korean Peninsula into the 20th century. The organization of Korean elementary and higher educational systems, the introduction of the Hangul alphabet and the encouragement of Koreans to celebrate their past, its transportation and industrial infrastructure were given to Korea at Japanese expense and resulted in the modern economic dynamo that the Republic of Korea is today. As Mr. Matsuki suggests, if Koreans truly believe that they were able to modernize themselves, then it is Japan that is owed compensation and not Korea.