

Jeju 4·3 Grand Tragedy Through Lens of Asian Pacific Peace Context

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Abstract

If we patiently continue to share our vision and to strengthen our solidarity among us who know already something about Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy during 'peacetime' Korea, we may be able to accomplish something when these few victims are still alive. I sincerely hope that the dream Dr. Martin Luther King announced at the march of Washington D.C. in 1963 be realized also to the victims of Jeju 4·3. A dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be plain and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Key words :

Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy during 'peacetime' Korea, Jeju 4·3 Human Rights, the Victims of Jeju 4·3, Martin Luther King, A dream.

1) This article was a revised keynote speech at The 19th World Peace Island Forum at University of Pennsylvania in USA on April 29, 2019.

Introduction

First of all I would like to express my deep appreciation with high esteem to the participants who have been continuously involved in enhancing the social healing and reparative reconciliation between Korea and the U.S. with respect to Jeju 4.3.²

This year in Korea we are celebrating the Centenary Anniversary of March 1 Independence Movement and there are lots of efforts to re-evaluate the significance of this historic event. On March 1, 1919 Korean people made almost simultaneously a large scale of demonstrations across the country, proclaiming the Independence, equality, freedom and justice. It was a non-violent rally against the Japanese colonial annexation of 1910. People flocked in streets, markets and public squares all over Korea. Students, teachers, shopkeepers, workers, civil-servants, men and women, old and young joined the demonstrations crying out the freedom and the Independence. This was a nation-wide revolution which broke out spontaneously resisting against the Japanese Empire and it continued for several months.

The Sam-il March 1 Movement in Korea

The Sam-il March 1 Movement was the crucial event which gave the greatest impact to later Korean history in many ways. It was the starting point of formulating the new political, social and cultural identity of modern Korean people. It was the crossroad which opened the way to modern democracy resisting against the Japanese Imperialism, saying goodbye to the old regime of Chosun Monarchy as well.

After the World War I, leaders of Korean people were greatly encouraged by the statement of President Wilson addressed to the Congress on Jan. 18, 1919. He stated "National aspirations must be respected; people may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent. 'Self-determination' is not a mere phrase; it is an imperative principle of action." And in 1918 Korean intellectuals came to know the independence of the new Republics like Czechoslovakia, Poland. They were also very much stimulated by the successful revolutions in China, Russia, Finland and Hungary.

So March 1 Movement was not an event which

happened accidentally in Korea and disappeared after some time. It was right in the main stream of modern world history flowing towards the new era of independence and democracy. In Korea also people started a grand march towards freedom, equality and independence resisting against Japanese Empire. Japanese Government reacted with total suppression and violence against this Movement. More than 7,000 demonstrators got killed, 45,000 injured and 49,000 arrested.

It appeared outwardly that March 1 Movement ended in failure because of this violent suppression. There were no sign of uprising any further in following years in Korean peninsula. However, many people who had sought asylum in China, Russia and the U.S, started a more systematic resistance against Japan establishing the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea in China on April 11, 1919. Although people in Korea could not continue their resistance movement within the country, they maintained many clandestine routes to support the activities of the Provisional Korean Government in China. And after the failure of Sam-il Movement, many young intellectuals of Korea got interested in socialist movement as an effective way to fight against Japanese Imperialism. For many Koreans of that time, to be involved in socialist movement was identified with action for independence or resistance. Therefore, in many sense the spirit of March 1 Movement had been the driving force of continuous resistance against Japan up till the end of WW II.

The Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy and U.S.

When Japanese Emperor Hirohito broadcasted the unconditional surrender on Aug. 15, 1945, Korean People rejoiced with great enthusiasm and thought they could finally establish their own independent country. But when US Troops landed in Korea on September 8, 1945, the Lieutenant General John Reed Hodge took over the power from Japanese colonial government at the surrender ceremony. He had fought as the commanding officer of XXIV Corps in Okinawa. Coming to Korea as the commander of occupation force he seemed to presume Korea as another part of Japanese Empire.

20 days later on Sept. 28, he sent a team of 7th Army separately to Jeju for disarming 70,000 Japanese Troops in the island. In the last moment of WW II, Japanese Army had mobilized the great number of troops into the small Island of Jeju to fight

2) Peter Kang, U-il (2018), "Forward : Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy Becomes Human Spirit in the Asia Pacific", Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy during 'peacetime' Korea : The Asia Pacific Context (1947-2016), Korea, Jeju : C & P.

back to the last man, if the mainland Japan were to be occupied by U.S. troops. They decided to make Jeju as their final fortress. They filled the whole coastline with bomb shelters and armed bunkers. In a southern hill of Jeju we can still find a huge underground shelter and a long tunnel of 1 mile where you can move around with small vehicles. Jeju must have looked like a strongly fortified base with heavy weapons and a large number of troops.

U.S. soldiers did not have any prior knowledge on Korean history and her culture. They were not prepared to understand the historic frustrations of Koreans nor an ardent desire of Korean people for a new nation. They were not competent in dealing with complicated social and economic issues of Korea. They were totally ignorant about the social background of Jeju. They were only ordered to keep domestic security against any disorder possibly caused by socialists or communist party in connection with Soviet Union.

The gap between the competence of U.S. military and the expectation of the people in Jeju bore a painful tragedy of 4·3 in Jeju. While the U.S. military had ruled South Korea for three years after the surrender of Japan, their socio-economic policy completely failed. Especially in Jeju acute shortage of food and jobs made people panic.

In this chaotic situation, on March 1, 1947 a great multitude of Jeju people gathered in a schoolyard to complain about their hazardous situation. The fact that they chose the day of March 1, insinuated that people did not consider U.S. military as liberator or a friend but rather as another intruder. U.S. military leaders were very clumsy in embracing and collaborating with leaders of local people who were ready indeed to build by themselves a new country of their own. They did not grasp that opinion leaders of Jeju had been inclined to socialism as a tool to fight against Japanese Imperialism.

U.S. military regime confronted with Soviet Army occupying North Korea seemed too conscious of leftist influence in South Korea. They easily judged the whole islanders of Jeju as red rebels connected with communist activists, which was a very incorrect information manipulated by Korean police intelligence who had long served as policemen during the Japanese colonial era. The misconception, prejudice and the misjudgment of U.S. military made many islanders turn their back to them, and boycott the election. They could not accept the election to be held only in the South which would surely divide the country and blow the chance to build a new nation.

That was the reason why the leftist group rose in arms.

After the uprising of 4·3 the Korean commanding officer, Kim Ik-yol, of 9th regiment in Jeju tried to negotiate with the representative of leftist uprising force and reached an agreement for the cease-fire of 72 hours. However, the U.S. military regime dismissed Commander Kim replacing him by another officer, lieutenant colonel Park Jin-kyong, who had served in Japanese Army. The U.S. leaders wanted total eradication of leftist forces. The new commander Park arrested and detained about 3,000 civilians in 44 days. Then he was assassinated by his staff officer, Lieutenant Moon Song-kil. He gave his final testimony in the court martial as follows. "I do not think I'd live after killing my immediate superior. I committed it assuming the death penalty. I am ready to obey to the sentence and I won't have a grudge against this court. We will meet in the next world in front of God all together, the Commander Park and all those present here. The court of this world may not be righteous but I believe the court of God will absolutely be right and just." The new commanders of 9th regiment appointed by U.S. military all did have military career in Japanese Army and they faithfully followed the U.S. policy, the extermination of all leftist movement, which eventually resulted a genocide of 30,000 people in Jeju. And Mr. Seung-man Lee, after he was elected as President, succeeded the same policy depending upon U.S. military leadership.

USA Responsibility in the Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy

Beyond 30,000 victims killed in many villages of Jeju, a lot more descendants and relatives of 4·3 victims had to live for several decades being deprived of human rights. They were not allowed to apply for any civil service nor to travel abroad freely. Many stowed away to Japan. Others fled to different places far from Jeju. Wherever they move to, they chose not to reveal their origins to their neighborhood. Those remaining in Jeju have been watched and controlled by police for many years.

Last month 130 people were newly registered as victims of Jeju 4·3 and 5,000 as family of victims. They had hesitated for many years to come out openly because they had a deep fear and doubt if they would not be harassed and persecuted by the government. It was only three months ago on Jan. 17 of this year that 18 people mostly over 90 years old, who had been put into prison for many years in the past, were finally declared not guilty in the retrial of Jeju district court. After the uprising of Jeju 4·3 1948, 2530 people were

suddenly arrested and imprisoned. Many of them were still teenagers. Without any proper procedures of investigation and trial they were taken away to several prisons of other region. Many of them were executed but some were sentenced to 1 to 20 years of imprisonment after which they were released. Among these convicted it is assumed that 30 people are still alive. An 4·3 NGO in Jeju who work for these convicted, investigated and visited each of these and 18 agreed to apply for a retrial last year. After 70 years the district court of Jeju finally declared that they were not guilty. What an absurd tragic history have they gone through on account of ignorant policy and prejudice of political powers?

I know that American people are quite proud of their country which has fairly respected and protected the human rights of minorities. But I suppose it needed very many years to reach this state. In 1960s there were still intolerable racial segregation and discrimination in the U.S. when Dr. Martin Luther King made the March for jobs and freedom in Washington. But by his courageous protests and struggle and by efforts of all those who shared his vision and action for many years, the general consciousness of Americans on human rights and the social system has been greatly improved in this country. It is my wish and prayer that the U.S. would make more progress in safeguarding the sublime value of human rights by promoting the reparative justice and social healing with regard to Jeju 4·3 tragedy.

It's a time for USA Government to start its Social Healing of Jeju 4.3 Village, Victims and Survivors³

The role of US military in Jeju 4·3 genocide has been totally unknown to most American citizens and we cannot find yet any sense of responsibility among political leaders of US. I guess it would take much more time to let the truth be disclosed and recognized by American public. The victims of Jeju 4·3 still alive are mostly late 80s or mid90s. What they wish most after 70 years, is that they want to hear sincere apology of those who were responsible for the tragedy. The President Mr. Moon extended his formal apology to the victims and all Islanders of Jeju taking part in the memorial service of Jeju 4·3 last year. This year on the memorial service of April 3 in Jeju a young college girl gave a testimony of her grandmother's hidden life of 70 years after 4·3. Up to

3) I have participated in Jeju 4.3 Reconciliation Conferences five times : D.C. in March of 2015 and September of 2016, New York in May of 2017, Chicago in April of 2018. I was empathetic that Jeju 4.3 survivors witnessed their untold stories to American audience.

recent days she thought that her grandmother loved so much to visit seashore. But very recently she was told that her grandmother at the age of 8 had lost her parents, a brother and a sister in the sea. Soldiers took them together to the near seashore. This 8year-old girl resisted with all her power but she was hit by a soldier and passed out. When she woke up, whole her family were thrown in the sea. She visited seashore not because she loved the beauty of sea but because she missed her family drowned in the sea. She could never eat any kind of fish for her whole life because it reminded her of the death of her family. It is the long-cherished wish of Jeju people that somebody who may represent the U.S. have the courage and the good will to speak publicly the responsibility on Jeju 4·3. If that happens in some way, it would be a great occasion of reconciliation and healing between Jeju Korea and the U.S. Not so much time is left if we consider the age of the victims.

But if we patiently continue to share our vision and to strengthen our solidarity among us who know already something about this tragedy, we may be able to accomplish something when these few victims are still alive. I sincerely hope that the dream Dr. Martin Luther King announced at the march of Washington in 1963 be realized also to the victims of Jeju 4·3. "A dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be plain and the crooked places will be made straight, "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."⁴

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4) I give my dream of social healing of Jeju 4.3 Grand Tragedy to American audience on June 20, 2019 at the UN Symposium on Human Rights and Jeju 4.3.