Jeju 4.3 and Zainichi Society: Beyond the logic of division and exclusion

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Abstract

With the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule, many people from Jeju returned to their homeland, but in the period of chaos directly before and after 4.3, the majority of them went back to Osaka and other places in Japan. Among these people, there were more than a few people who were involved in the armed group that led the 4.3 uprising. However, the South Korean government has adopted a policy of excluding them from the status of victims. Unlike in the Korean Peninsula, which is geographically separated into north and south, in Zainichi society the “south” and the “north” share a single sphere of daily life. If efforts to resolve the 4.3 issue continue excluding the leaders of the armed uprising from recognition as victims, there is no way to avoid alienation from Zainichi society.

Key words: Jeju 4.3, Zainichi Society, GHQ/SCAP, Stowaway, Refugee, National Ideology, Osaka,
Introduction

In the hours before daybreak on April 3, 1948, a red signal light flickered from the orum, or volcanic crater, which surrounds Halla mountain, the tallest peak on the island of Jeju. On this signal, an armed group led by the younger members of the Jeju Branch of the South Korean Labor Party attacked the station of the regional police force, as well as the residences of key figures in right wing groups on the island. Although the group was technically “armed,” this was a small-scale action conducted by only about 350 people, who had about thirty outdated guns between them; otherwise, they relied on swords, sharpened bamboo spears, and scythes. However, this ultimately led to the unprecedented calamity that claimed the lives of over thirty thousand Jeju islanders, the tragedy that is known as the “Jeju April Third Incident.” In this presentation, I will refer to it as “Jeju 4.3.”

Under the anti-communist authoritarian regime that emerged after the Korean War, Jeju 4.3 was stigmatized as a “communist insurrection,” and for a long time, speaking about it honestly was seen as a taboo. Islanders had no outlet for the memories of this tragedy, and deeply internalized these memories, repressing their true selves and emotions. For people from the island to finally be able to overcome this taboo and speak out about their nightmarish experiences, it took until the later half of the 1980s, when Korean society had begun to move along the path towards democratization and liberation from authoritarianism.

More than thirty years have passed since the democratization of Korea, and there has been much progress up to this point towards resolution of the 4.3 issue: notable steps include the finalization of the “Jeju April 3 Incident Investigation Report” (2000), Former President No Moohyun’s apology to the victims of 4.3 and the islanders of Jeju (2003), the implementation of programs for the exhumation of the remains of the victims of 4.3 (2006 onwards), the construction of the 4.3 Peace Park (2008), and the establishment of the Jeju April 3 Peace Foundation in the same year, as well as Former President Moon Jaein’s declaration of the “complete resolution” of 4.3 (2018).

As the social atmosphere surrounding 4.3 has changed dramatically, survivors such as Zainichi poet Kim Sijong, who experienced 4.3 personally but kept their silence, have begun to actively speak out and create written works. Researchers also have worked tirelessly at tasks like re-recording the testimonies of surviving victims. Resolution of the 4.3 issue has progressed to the point where the president can allude to the “complete resolution of 4.3.” Developments like these in South Korea have encouraged the 4.3 movement in Japan, leading to a relationship in which each influences the other. However, on the other hand, it is also clear that we must pose critical questions, asking whether the trends and issues at stake in the “complete resolution of 4.3” have not in fact developed in a way that is totally alienated from the realities of Zainichi society regarding 4.3.

In 2002, the 4.3 Committee (that is, the Committee for the Truth Investigation of the Jeju April 3 Incident and Honoring Victims), taking into account the previous year’s Constitutional Court opinion regarding recognition of victim status, prescribed standards for deliberating on and determining 4.3 victim status in the following way:

“In accordance with the fundamental ideal of our country’s constitution, of causing no damage to fundamental social order or to South Korean identity, and leveraging the intent and goals of the 4.3 Special Law, while we recognize the broadest possible spectrum of victims, those who stray from the fundamental ordering principles of liberal democracy will, as a special exception, be excluded from the status of victim.”

We can see that this provision is based on explicit national ideology that takes the current reality of the division of Korea as its premise. Since 2002, the method of recognizing victim status that was enacted by the 4.3 Committee has of course been put into practice “as broadly as possible,” but it is impossible to deny that it has been implemented in a

2) Jeju 4・3 Uiweon-Hoe [Committee for the Truth Investigation The Jeju April 3 Incident and Honoring Victims] (2008), pp.149
way that incorporates a "logic of exclusion" based on "national identity." As I will explain below, this logic of exclusion has particularly significant implications for the resolution of the 4.3 issue in Zainichi society.

In this presentation, drawing on research and recorded testimonies regarding Zainichi Koreans from Jeju that have amassed since 2000, I will demonstrate the ways in which Zainichi Koreans from Jeju have transcended the framework of national ideology, and will consider an appropriate course for the resolution of these issues.

Undocumented Migrant (or Stowaways) to Japan before and after 4.3

In the colonial period in Japan, direct routes between Osaka and Jeju for passenger boats such as Kimigayo-maru / Kunde-fan were established; by the middle of the 1930s, about one fourth of the population of Jeju (more than fifty thousand people) lived in Japan. A stable community of people from Jeju formed in Osaka, and this community became part of the sphere of daily life for residents of Jeju who crossed the border between Japan and Korea. With the August fifteenth liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule, many people from Jeju returned to their liberated homeland, but in the period of chaos directly before and after 4.3, the majority of those who temporarily returned ultimately went back to Osaka and other places in Japan.

Because the U.S. occupying army (GHQ/SCAP) strictly prohibited Koreans from crossing back into Japan once they had returned to Korea, for Koreans who wished to re-enter Japan during this period, the only choice was to enter secretly as stowaways. For this reason, the only way to determine the extent and actual conditions of population movement from the Korean Peninsula during this period is to estimate based on related records and testimonies.

For a year or so directly after liberation, because the immigration management system had not yet been fully established, the flow of Jeju natives returning from Japan to Jeju intersected with a counter-current of Jeju natives going back to Japan due to issues related to the sudden increase in population, such as food shortages, difficulties finding work, and outbreaks of infectious disease. In this context, in December 1945, the U.S. Military Government in South Korea demanded that GHQ/SCAP prohibit those who had returned at any point to Korea from going to Japan without permission.

In response to this demand, in March 1946, GHQ/SCAP issued the directive that "Until public transportation can be used in a normal way, non-Japanese people will not be permitted to re-enter Japan, excepting cases with approval from SCAP." From April of the same year, although crackdowns on illegal entry gained momentum, in that year alone, over twenty thousand people seem to have entered Japan without documentation.

Below, I will present some estimates regarding the flow of Koreans secretly crossing to Japan between the beginning of the GHQ crackdowns and the outbreak of 4.3 around 1948, based on recently uncovered sources such as GHQ/SCAP’s "Data on Illegal Entry of Koreans for the years 1930(?)—1949(?)."

First, I will describe the changes in the numbers of people arrested for entry without documentation during this period. The highest number of people were arrested in 1946, between seventeen and twenty thousand people. In May of 1947, the Alien Registration Order was implemented, and that year saw the number of arrests fall to six thousand; in the next year, 1948, about eight thousand people were arrested, and this increased to eight-and-a-half thousand people in 1949. These numbers refer to Koreans arrested at the coast, and many of them were forcibly returned to South Korea. However, the Eighth Army, which was the regional military administration of the occupying army, estimated that the number of arrests in 1949 was only half of stowaways that year.

If we apply these figures without modification, then in the three years immediately before and after 4.3, more than twenty thousand people successfully entered Japan secretly. In fact, there are also testimonies such as "there

4) GHQ SCAPIN—822: REPATRIATION 1946/03/16.
5) Other sources on the number of smugglers arrested during this period include Yoshiharu Takeno, 1954, and the Immigration Bureau of the Ministry of Justice (1981).
are two to three times more people who were not
arrested than people who were arrested,” and “only
10% of stowaways were arrested.”

It is not always clear where stowaways were
originally from, but between August and December
1949, among the 139 Korean people arrested for
“illegal entry,” 84 people (or about 60%) were from
Jeju. Performing a simple calculation based on this
percentage, in the period right before and after
the 4.3 incident, that would mean that at least ten
thousand people crossed from Jeju to Japan.

The crossing of people from Jeju to Japan continued
after the Korean War as well, due to the fact that
under the anti-communist regime there was a wide-
spread system of “guilt by association” targeting
those close to people suspected of communist
sympathies, and also because of the hardships
people faced in their everyday lives. Until the Treaty
on Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic
of Korea was signed in 1965, every year over a
thousand arrests were recorded. During this period,
the percentage of Zainichi Koreans who were from
Jeju increased from 12% (64,117 people) in 1952 to
15% (86,490 people).

Among the Jeju natives who crossed in this way
like refugees to Japan, there were more than a few
people who were involved in the armed group that
led the uprising, as well as their family members.
This is why Osaka, which was the destination for
many stowaways, is known as the “second site of
Jeju 4.3:” it is impossible to resolve the 4.3 issue
without considering this situation in Japan.

Transcending division

In February 2021, there was a complete revision of
the Special Law for the Truth Investigation of the Jeju
April 3 Incident and Honoring Victims, which newly
incorporated provisions such as consolation money
for the victims, a special reexamination of the cases
of victims sentenced by unjust military trials at the
time of 4.3, the operation of a 4.3 Trauma Center,
and additional investigation into the truth of the
actual harm caused by 4.3. In addition, in December,
there was a “partial revision” which included writing
in additional details about the “consolation money
for victims,” using the word “reparations.” With
this, the long-standing dearly-held wish of the 4.3
victims and their families for reparations was realized
in both name and practice. However, the realization
of this form of reparations requires us to reconsider
the question of who exactly the “victims” are who
become eligible for reparations.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the South
Korean Government’s approach to recognizing
victimhood status is fundamentally premised on a
logic of exclusion based on national ideology. It goes
without saying that at the time of 4.3, among the
Jeju natives who fled death by crossing into Japan,
there were more than a few who followed a path
of recovery in their lived realities that was inclined
toward what could be called the national ideology of
North Korea. People like this are excluded from the
framework of “South Korean identity,” which figures
in the standards used to determine victimhood status
as prescribed by the 4.3 Committee.

Unlike in the Korean Peninsula, which is
geographically separated into north and south, in
Zainichi society the “south” and the “north” share
a single sphere of daily life. If efforts to resolve the
4.3 issue and provide reparations continue excluding
the leaders of the armed uprising from recognition
as victims, there is no way to avoid alienation
from Zainichi society, in which various values
and inclinations coexist. Until all of those who
experienced 4.3, whether left wing or right wing, are
publicly honored and memorialized, it must be said
that we are far from a resolution of the 4.3 issue in
Zainichi society.

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