

Open Forum—History/Conversation Series 5
Korea, Japan and Koreans Living in Japan—29 Students from
14 Universities

The Second Japan-Korea Student Forum was Held
A Conversation on the Topic “Is *Kimchee* Better than Arguing?”
and “The Media and Hand-On Exchange”



Does the Korean boom (Korean trend) including the hit TV drama *Winter Sonata* help both countries understand history? Does it help friendly relations between the two countries take root? How does media coverage on the abduction issue influence North Korea, or the relationship between Korea and Japan? The second Japan-Korea Student Forum 2004 was held recently, bringing together students from both countries to talk about the present, past and the future of relations between the two countries. This was the second “Conversation for the Future” by students sponsored by the Asian Women’s Fund, following the first held in July last year.

This time, the forum was entitled *Japan-Korea Student Forum—Media, Experience and Japan-Korea Relations*. The forum consisted of a visit for an interview, a team meeting and an open forum as the general meeting and was held on August 23 and 24, 2004. On the 24th, the open forum was held at the United Nations University Conference Hall from 1:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Commentators included Professor Lee Won-Woong (Kwandong University, Korea), Associate Professor Kizo Ogura (Tokai University), Professor Hiroko Hashimoto (Jumonji University) and Momoyo Ise (Secretary/Executive Director, Asian Women’s Fund).

The universities participated from Korea included Kwandong University, Sogang

University, Ewha Womans University, Kyung Hee University and Hankook University of Foreign Studies. Koreans living in Japan and Japanese students participated from Temple University Japan, Waseda University, Chuo University, Nippon Sports Science University, Meiji University, Keio University, Jumonji University, Ochanomizu University and University of Tokyo. The participants consisted of 13 Koreans, two foreign students studying in Japan (one of which was a *Chosenzoku* or a Korean living in China), four Koreans living in Japan and ten Japanese.

Here is what the forum aimed to achieve this time: Events that take place in Japan and Korea (or Japan and North Korea) and the situation between the two countries, and how they are reported by the media form people's opinions about the relations between the two countries, as well as their impressions and evaluations of each other. Meanwhile, the diversification of information and the media, and personal experience built as people visit each country have started to influence opinions on bilateral relations. Some 30 Japanese and Korean students and Koreans living in Japan who are students, who live "today and build a future relationship between Japan and Korea gather together in a hall to examine the past from each individual point of view in terms of politics, society, culture and information and talk with each other about the future.

A question was raised, "Is *Kimchee* Better than Arguing?" Looking at the historical issues in the past and the current Korean boom you cannot help but compare the impressions and opinions acquired through media coverage and the world of journalists with those acquired through personal experience, including surfing the Net, going to the movies, listening to music, watching TV dramas, eating food and traveling. Which has the stronger influence on students? How do the students evaluate different kinds of impressions and opinions? This is the point at issue. Does *Winter Sonata* fever lead to an understanding of the historical problems by both countries, or doesn't it? The participants did not say that it should. Instead, both positive and negative opinions about the actual boom as a phenomenon crossed each other. The students were consciously basing their opinions on the historical background, while regarding the currently increasing interest in each other as a positive fact. They expressed their opinions to each other. Responses from the students included "I used this forum as an opportunity to think about the comfort women issue" (Japanese student) and "I learned that the Japanese people have stronger interest in Korea than I had expected." (Korean student)

Many of the students have never been to each other's countries. This forum provided them with the first hands-on experience of things from both countries. It was

face-to-face experience of the neighboring Korea, Koreans living in Japan and Japan. In the visit on the morning of August 23, the participating students met with Mr. Kim Geun-Hee, the president of Kankokuhiroba, Inc., who manages supermarkets that sell Korean foodstuffs, bookstores and restaurants in Tokyo's Shinjuku. Mr. Kim offers "garlicky *kimchee*" and "an honest portrayal of Korea" to Japanese people and promotes Korea-Japan exchange through everyday living and culture. His story is concrete and practical. He says that he does what he can. According to Mr. Kim, *Winter Sonata* fans visit his supermarkets, bookstores and restaurants and the client base of Korea town is expanding all over the Shinjuku-Okubo area.

On the afternoon of the same day, the students visited Asahi Shimbun. Kim Choong-Seek, the president of the Japan branch of the Korean newspaper *The Dong-A Ilbo*, which is in an alliance with *the Asahi Shimbun*, and Haruhito Kiyota, director of the Asahi Shimbun Research Center together with reporters from *The Asahi Shimbun* joined them in a discussion about media and civil exchange, newspapers and the Internet. Mr. Kiyota spoke about the current situation where common ground was being established among ordinary people in their everyday lives, despite the historical and political circumstances surrounding Japan-Korea relations. "There are more ways to obtain information on your own, but many important things are not available on the Internet," he said, adding that the people who work for the newspaper take care when it comes to ideology, nationalism and coverage containing stereotypes, and that they sought to raise awareness of a genuine reconciliation between the two countries with historical issues in mind. A reporter from *The Asahi Shimbun* pointed out that Korean documentary films that had previously never seen the light were being exposed more often because of the widespread Korean boom in Japan.

The Korean students who remained in Japan after the forum at their own expense visited Yasukuni Shrine and other places. Japanese and Korean students living in Japan accompanied them and shared the experience and conversation as contemporaries. Some Japanese students lost no time in deciding to go to Korea, and Korean students sent them e-mails saying that they were looking forward to it. Others sent requests to the Fund saying that they strongly hoped that the forum would be held regularly.

The first forum was held last year with Professor Lee Won-Woong of Korea and Professor Yozo Yokota helping to create the opportunity. This time, building on what was gained last time, we asked both professors and Professor Hiroko Hashiguchi to advertise for students who wanted to participate. As a result, we were able to attract

more students from different universities. Steady progress has been made as a forum for students to ponder history and the future, and as an event suitable for the purpose of the Asian Women's Fund. (A record of this forum will be published by the end of this fiscal year in pamphlet form.)

- From the reports written by the students

"I treasure the time I spent," "The danger of having fixed ideas that makes one hate a country or its people," "They listened to stories about me, a Korean living in Japan," and "Exchange at the level of ordinary people is important." We asked the participants to submit reports following the forum. Here are some excerpts from those that have been sent in so far.

Lee Ji-Won (Korea)

The interview with Korai president Kim Geun-Hee was awesome. I paid careful attention to what he was saying and was happy to feel that he and I shared the same ideas. I totally agreed with him when he said that Korean food culture and the current Korean boom can function as a point of contact between the two countries to enable a better understanding. It was a refreshing sensation to directly hear my contemporary say that it was not about evaluating today what has already happened in the past. If people who think that way increase in number in both countries even a little at a time, the history of the two countries will definitely take a new direction.

Cho Fa-gi (Korean living in Japan)

Korean students are full of energy. They were that way when we talk and they throw questions at me without a break. Korean girls in particular talk with such enthusiasm. When Korean students are talking with each other, it is totally different from how Japanese students talk and they almost seem to be fighting each other. Korean students asked me how I had learned to speak Korean. I talked about the Korean school I went to and the Koreans living in Japan to the best of my ability to explain. They listened while nodding, and were surprised and impressed. They acted as if they had never heard of the Koreans living in Japan. I cannot explain it very well but it made me quite happy to be asked about such things in such an energetic manner.

Tamiyuki Onihara (Japan)

When you try to communicate with others it is important to think, "I want to know about the other person deeply." To know the other person well you must let that person know

you well. In this sense, fixed ideas only serve as obstacles. Let's accept people who have opinions that differ from ours. At the same time, let's hold our own sincere opinions that are good enough to share with others. To be honest, I had my hands full trying to express myself in the program, but it left me with much that is of value.

Ko Sugawara (Japan)

I was able to see that Koreans were trying to improve the relationship between Japan and Korea for the future while making compromises. They thought that it would not improve if they maintained an anti-Japanese feeling about historical issues for ever. I would never have been able to notice this without this forum, which is an opportunity for friendly exchange. In this sense, we must be aware of the importance of friendly exchange and continue to increase opportunities for that purpose to prevent misunderstanding between Japan and Korea at the level of ordinary people and to establish strong ties between the two countries.