



# Korea-Japan or Japan-Korea?

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"Daddy, why do you have to go to Japan?" Seoyoung (瑞榮), my seven-year-old daughter, asked me, when I was packing my stuff to send to Japan. She asked me the same question the day before. I gave her the same answer as the day before, "Because I need to work on the Japanese satellite project. You know how fantastic a satellite is!" She grumbled a reply, "I know a satellite is good. But I can't understand why my father have to go to Japan instead of other colleagues of yours in Seoul National University (SNU)." She must have thought about it many times. But I could not make myself clear to her because things are so complex to explain to a seven-year-old girl.

I am supposed to stay at the ISAS from August, 2001 to August, 2002 to participate ASTRO-F project. It is a great chance for me to focus on research without any burden of teaching and doing miscellaneous duties. Besides, it has been decided by SNU that I am on a sabbatical leave which is usually allowed for those working for SNU more than six years, although I have been working only for three years. The only problem was that I had to go to Japan without my family. My wife has a job, working for Inha University in Korea. She has just given birth to our second child, Chanyoung (贊榮). Seoyoung doesn't want to go to Japanese elementary school, worrying that Japanese children may dislike her; she has read some books saying about Japanese colonial rule of Korean peninsula. Whenever I tell Seoyoung's worry to other Koreans in Japan, they maintain that Japanese students are very nice to their Korean classmates. Seoyoung's apprehension was found to be too much. Going to Japanese school would be a good opportunity to her in many aspects. But she decides not to go to.

The relationship between Korea and Japan (or Japan and Korea) is very complex. From the linguistic point of view, Korean and Japanese belong to the same language family. Even if some say that the two languages are not so similar as English and French are, I still find many Japanese words in everyday life that have pronunciation similar to that of the correspondent Korean words.

Historically, there were many activities of trade between Korea and Japan until the 7th century. But the two countries had gone on very different political tracks since then and thereby their culture had become different. Since the end of the 19th century, Japan had practically ruled Korea. That is, Korea had been a Japanese colony for 35 years until 1945.

When one of my Japanese friends visited Korea, I asked how he felt about Korea. He said that it was such a surprise to see the two countries are very similar in many aspects. It took him just two days to realize that the cultures are so different. To put it simple, the format is exactly the same (because Korea has copied many Japanese systems), but the contents are different (because Koreans are different from Japanese). Sometimes I feel shame to see disorders in Korea because I know how things are ordered in Japan. Also many Japanese complain that Koreans are too rude and aggressive. It is true, however, that many Koreans who live in Japan complain that Japanese are too kind and too perfect. They hope that Japanese will be more emotional, frank, and opened in personal relationships. Based on my experiences of living in the United States and Germany, I become to believe that there is no superior culture in the world. The important thing is that we should make efforts to understand one another. Since Korea and Japan are very different, one should not see the other with its own point of view.

The tragic relationship between Korea and Japan was finished 56 years ago. But still there are many sensitive issues left between the two. In Korea, displaying or broadcasting Japanese movies or songs are still banned. In Japan, describing what happened between the two countries in the textbooks is still an issue. The official name of the 2002 World Cup game, "Korea-Japan World Cup" or "Japan-Korea World Cup," is still a controversy. However, I'd like to see all these things are natural arising from the process in which the two countries meet with and understand each other and thus disappear as time goes by. In fact, Japan is being open to Korea in many ways. More Japanese tourists are visiting Korea these days. I can see many Korean restaurants in Japan. This year, the ISAS has hosted four visiting professors from Korea and started more collaborative projects with Korean scientists. I believe that the relationship between Korea and Japan will be a lot better enough to overcome the issue of "Korea-Japan" or "Japan-Korea". (パク・スージョン)



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NYの後輩の今後が気にかかります。きりの  
ないことにならないよう祈るばかりです。  
(上田)

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