

Research regarding the History of Japanese Government Policies during Colonial Rule

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Introduction

In recent years, research both in Japan and in Korea with regard to the history of Japan's colonial rule of Korea has borne much fruit. It can also be said that, as compared with the past, there is increased interest in society as a whole with regard to the history of colonial rule. But, on the other hand, with a mind to glorify modern Japanese history, there have also been expressions of the opinion that the history of colonial rule should be viewed positively.

As can be observed in the case of problems last year with regard to the content of Japanese school text-books, how we look at the history of Japanese colonial rule remains a current issue and one that will be quite relevant to the building of future relations between Japan and the Korean Peninsula (with both North and South Korea). To further the mutual understanding between Japan and North and South Korea, within the history of relations between Japan and Korea, a deepening of the historic knowledge of the period of colonial rule—and one that is based on reality—is indispensable.

In this report, after describing in general terms the current status of historical studies related to Japanese colonial government policy, I would like to touch upon areas that should be addressed in the future and to discuss the direction of future research.

1. The Importance of Studying Policy History

While I have made “the history of government policies during colonial rule” the theme of this report, the study of policy history should not be limited simply to a clarification of the kind of policies that were implemented. Of course, it is important that we clarify what policies were actually enacted and the process and conditions under which they were

enforced, but there is also a need to consider matters, such as why that policy was adopted, whether there was the possibility of choosing other policies, and so on. In order to make clear the intent of such policies, and the many factors that were fundamental to policy decisions, it is vital that an analysis of the policy decision making process be made.

However, as regards the policies of colonial rule, research to shed light upon this decision making process, remains in a state that is exceedingly inadequate. While it must be said that restrictions on the availability of materials are largely responsible for this, it also results from the fact that no framework has been built for the analysis of government policies.

Generally speaking, the conventional approach to the study of the history of colonial rule and colonial policies has been in the framework of the oppression of colonial rule and resistance on the part of the Korean people who were opposed to it. There has been an emphasis on the need to bring to light not only the oppression but the aspect of appeasement, and not only resistance but submission and cooperation, but even in this case there has been no change in the actual framework of "Japan as ruler" and "Korea as the ruled."

Insofar as one is addressing colonial rule, it goes without saying that one should attach great importance to this fundamental relationship between the ruler and the ruled, but if one is to shed light on the ruling government's policies and, in particular, on the process by which these policies were decided, the framework for this analysis must be multi-faceted and multi-layered. While it depends upon the policy being studied, with a monolithic view of "Japan as ruler" and "Korea as the ruled," it would seem that we cannot achieve an accurate understanding of the many factors involved in policy decisions. With regard to the aspect of government, it is necessary to clearly define differences between the Governor-General of Korea and the Japanese government, and various differences in their positions internally. Further, it would seem that there are also instances where other factors (the military, the Diet, Japanese residing in Korea, and the like) should be taken into consideration as well.

Making use of a multi-faceted and multi-layered framework in the analysis of the policy decision making process, it will probably be necessary, henceforth, to make clear the intent of policies during colonial

Research regarding the History of Japanese Government Policies during Colonial Rule rule, and the many factors that were the basis for policy decisions.

2. From the Viewpoint of “Imperial History”

A new trend in the study of colonial rule that must be mentioned is research from the perspective of “imperial history.” This is also related to the multi-faceted, multi-layered research framework mentioned above.

Before the war, not only did Japan control Korea, Taiwan, Sakhalin, the Kwantung Province (the Liaotung Peninsula), the South Sea Islands and so on as territories, leased territories, and mandated territories, Japan also came to control Manchukuo (Manchuria), China and Southeast Asia as occupied territories. Japan had come to have that which, in essence, is an “Empire.” Research that addresses the Korean colony’s position in that “Empire,” the nature of the relationship between policy for the control of Korea and policy for the systematic control of the “empire,” and the like, has begun to be published.

Research that attempts to investigate the real state of “imperial integration,” for the most part elucidates the concrete relationship between “domestic” political processes and colonial rule (and its policies). As regards Korea’s position within the “Empire,” attempts are being made to compare it with the control of Taiwan, and correlations with the control of Manchukuo are being discussed as well.

In particular, the study of Koreans who lived in Manchukuo has begun to gain popularity. It has been made clear that there were differences between the Governor-General of Korea and the Manchukuo government (in reality, the Kwantung army) with regard to the perception of Koreans living in Manchukuo and with regard to policy, and that, as an “Empire,” the positioning of Koreans residing in Manchukuo was a large problem for Japan. Further, even prior to the establishment of Manchukuo, as regards the matter of how to handle the citizenship of Koreans living abroad (whether or not to recognize the renunciation of their Japanese citizenship), it has become clear that there were differences of opinion with the Governor-General of Korea and even within the Japanese government. This and other research has raised new questions with regard to the actual state of affairs under “imperial rule” and “imperial integration.”

This consideration of new questions that become visible from the

perspective of “imperial history” and, conversely, the revisiting of “imperial history” through an elucidation of the realities of colonial rule in Korea, will continue to be important in the future.

One more thing I would like to point out here is that, thus far, when considering the history of Koreans living in Japan, the “imperial history” perspective has not been included. A lot of research has been amassed with regard to the history of Koreans living in Japan, but there have not been studies that have placed Japan’s perceptions or policies regarding the existence and treatment of Koreans in the context of “imperial history.” Perhaps the tendency to view the Koreans residing in Japan as an entity detached from the Korean peninsula has also cast a shadow on historic studies regarding Koreans living in Japan prior to the war. But, as in the case of the emigration from the Korean peninsula to Manchukuo, the movement of peoples to Japan not only influenced Japanese politics and society but also exercised influence on colonial policy in Korea itself, and can be thought to have been relevant to policies regarding Manchukuo as well. It would also seem that industrial policy, social works, labor policy (including the mobilization of workers during wartime) might be considered from such an “imperial history” perspective as well.

3. “Colonialism” and “Critique of Nationalism”

In recent years, there has been a distinct trend in Japanese history academic circles towards the critique of the “nation state” and in this connection the study of “colonialism” has also become popular. This is because the culture, ideology, and consciousness that are fundamental to the concept of the nation state are to be found in the act of controlling another nation, another region, and another people that is “colonialism.”

While it can be said that “colonialism” is a concept through which one can elucidate the consciousness, opinions, culture and the other problem areas that are distinctive to colonial rule, the increasing popularity of research making use of this concept may reflect a shift in focus away from conventional colonial research that concentrated on the analysis of socio-economic history and towards colonial history and colonial social history that draws upon cultural history. This also shows that a lot of research is being conducted with an awareness of the “post-colonial,” or

more precisely an attention to the matter of the dissolution of legacies in the colonies in the spheres of society, culture, life, consciousness and the like.

With nearly the same reasoning as the critique of the “nation state,” the critique of nationalism has also emerged in the field of historical research. In particular, this movement can be seen recently among history academia in Korea. It would seem that, insofar as “nationalism” was the principal and greatest factor in the creation of the modern nation state, that history justifies its critical contemplation.

But the issue here is how this is related to the explication of the history of colonial rule. One must point out the danger that by unilaterally dismantling and deconstructing nationalism, the essence of colonial rule may become obscured. Though the deconstruction of nationalism may be necessary in order to grasp history and reality, the very nationalism that was a primary factor and was stressed by the ruling authorities when they decided and executed policy, will not disappear. In considering the matter of colonial rule it must be said that, after all, insofar as it will continue to remain a primary cause, nationalism should be stressed.

After confirming this, one should probably then make the various issues related to colonialism presented above the object of their consideration.

4. The Doctrine of Assimilation

Then, the matter of the critique of nationalism also has relevance to a consideration of the ideal research methods to be used in clarifying the substance and essence of colonial rule. Among history academia in South Korea (and it can be said that nearly the same is true of history academics in North Korea as well), research that continues in the vein of the “nationalistic historical studies” that came into existence during the colonial period has become the mainstream. While the nationalistic historical studies were formed by history researchers who were directly or indirectly involved in the national movement, it goes without saying that their focus was on a critique of Japanese colonial rule. Naturally, at the time, Japan’s obliteration of the national culture and of the character of the people was a major object of their criticism. It may be said with regard to

Korea's history scholars who have inherited this sort of critical perspective, that they generally view Japanese colonial rule, in essence, as a "doctrine of assimilation."

Among Japanese history academics as well, this interpretation of colonial rule in terms of a doctrine of assimilation has come to be self evident. This can be seen as resulting both from the influence of pre-war colonization policy studies by Yanaihara Tadao and others who interpreted Japan's colonial policy as resembling that of France, and as an acceptance of the views held by South and North Korean scholars in the field of national history.

Nevertheless, recent studies have shown that the colonial rule practiced by many Western countries (including France) before the war exhibited an approach that differed from a doctrine of assimilation. Could it be that Japan alone adopted an assimilative approach?

Those wanting to look affirmatively at colonial rule often maintain that the Japanese rule of Korea was different from its Western counterparts and efforts to treat Korea and Japan (and Koreans and the Japanese) equally are put forward as the basis for their argument. This is to say that they affirmatively appraise the doctrine of assimilation and assimilation policy.

If one thinks in this way, viewing colonial government policies only from the side of a doctrine of assimilation, it seems that one would then misinterpret the essence of colonial rule.

One must acknowledge that in order for Japan to maintain control over—to maintain social order in—its colonies, like the Western countries in their colonies, not only was assimilation necessary but differentiation as well. Of course, a certain degree of assimilation was necessary in order to integrate colonies into "imperial Japan," to strive for their modernization, and to mobilize their human and material resources. However, on the other hand, it was also necessary for policy to maintain and strengthen colonial rule by preserving disparity. Could it not be said that, thus far, research has not been able to grasp both aspects?

Of course, it has been pointed out that together with assimilation, efforts were made to maintain and increase differentiation under colonial rule, but it must be said that these studies did not go so far as to logically explain the relationship between these two aspects, and then to reconsider

the true nature of colonial control (and colonial policy).

The analytical framework of “colonialism” that I referred to above is inherently ambiguous because it is interpreted differently depending on the researcher, but at least it can be said that it was born out of an effort to clarify both assimilation and differentiation. Though we need to pay attention to how colonialism manifests itself in the decision making and execution of colonial policy, we need to scrutinize and analyze it as well. Furthermore, it can be said that the reconsideration of whether Japanese colonial rule was based upon a doctrine of assimilation, or was of a contrary nature, is an important issue for the future.

Conclusion

In the above I have pointed out a number of concerns related to the study of the history of government policy during colonial rule. Because I have not discussed these problems in concrete terms, some points may have been difficult to comprehend and for this I ask your understanding.

Many areas remain to be studied, but here I would like in particular to emphasize the early period of colonial rule, namely the dearth of research regarding the decade beginning in 1910. Difficulties are presented with regard to the availability of materials, but without clarification regarding the nature of the policy that was carried out in the early years of colonial rule, one cannot have an accurate picture of colonial rule as a whole. I have come across many explanations of the character of colonial rule based upon the policy that was implemented during the war years, but that alone will not serve to shed light upon the true nature of colonial rule. Therefore I would like to recommend that new energy be dedicated to research with regard to the early period of colonial rule.