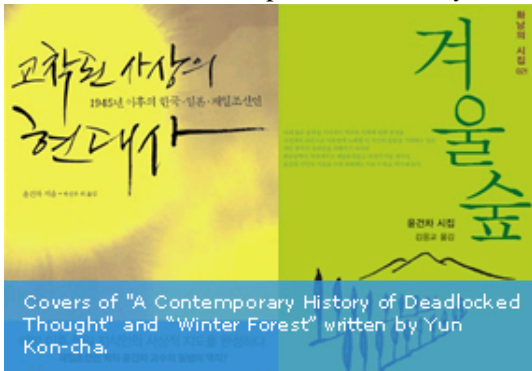


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## title text

A *Jainichi* Scholar Scrutinizes the ‘Unresolved Past of Korea and Japan’ **photo**  
Han Seung-dong  
Senior Reporter The Hankyoreh



## news

**“A Contemporary History of Deadlocked Thought” by Yun Kon-cha, Translated by Park Jin-u et al., Changbi Publishers Inc., 625 pages, 27,000 won;**

**“Winter Forest” by Yun Kon-cha, Translated by Kim Eung-gyo, Hwanam Publishing Co., 134 pages, 6,300 won**

“It seems it’s my duty to leave some meaningful marks by facing and struggling with an era that produced the so-called *jainichi* (Korean residents in Japan),” said Professor Yun Kon-cha of Kawakana University. Professor Yun is known as the author of “Trend of Modern Korean Thought” and “Modern Ideological Deadlocks in Korea and Japan.” He recently published two books in Seoul, “A Contemporary History of Deadlocked Thought” (*Gyochak-doen sasang-eui hyeondaesa*) and “Winter Forest” (*Gyeoul sup*). The former was originally published by Iwanami Shoten Publishers in Japan last year; the latter, simultaneously published in Korea and Japan, is Yun’s first poetry collection. For “Winter Forest,” Im Heon-yeong, a literary critic and professor, wrote an introduction under the heading “A Diasporan Intellectual’s Search for Self.” This can also be applied to “A Contemporary History of Deadlocked Thought.”

Yun’s search for self, though belated and seemingly sluggish, was dramatic and thoroughgoing. Through the vast research by Yun, who has studied enormous amounts of material, we may be able to experience an intellectual shock and an amazing extension of our views to encompass Japan and *jainichi* by moving our eyes to *jainichi*, from where his research began. This is directly linked to the problem of inaction in addressing the issue of “Japan’s imperial system and Joseon (Korea’s pre-modern state name)” and “the founding of a unified

Korea,” which remains an unresolved question from the decolonization process between Korea and Japan.

The Japan that Yun talks about can be very different from the Japan we know. While in high school he was surprised to find his name written in Korean style in the roll book and “desperately pleaded that it be changed to the Japanese style.” He graduated from Kyoto University but could not find a job. “With nowhere else to go,” he enrolled for a graduate program at the University of Tokyo and earned a doctorate at the age of 38. It was about this time that he acknowledged he was jainichi. Thereafter he desperately clung to studying modern Japan, especially Japan after its defeat in World War II, and jainichi. These days he is more devoted to the study of Korean society. He met Hong Se-hwa, a pro-democracy activist known as “a taxi driver in Paris,” and his friends in Europe around the time of the democratization struggle of June 1987. Around that time his passport problems were solved so he began traveling to Korea frequently. Hence he began to see the world through Korea.

The original Japanese title of “A Contemporary History of Deadlocked Thought” may be translated into “Deadlocked Experience of Thought.” Therefore, it is not anyone else’s story but a chronicle of the author’s own experience of journeying back and forth between Japan, jainichi and Korea, each with a different ideological soil. The book grasps the paths trodden by Japan, Korea (South Korea) and Korean residents in Japan since the defeat/liberation of August 1945 to the present primarily “as the ideological experiences imprinted in history” by looking at them through the eyes of the Korean residents in Japan, who are the “products of Japan’s colonial rule over Korea, the living witnesses of history and the most acute embodiment of Japan’s brutal rule over other nations,” and “the historical existences manifesting the absurdity of modern Japan in the most miserable shape.”

The “thought” discussed by Yun refers to the “desperate and repeated question as to how to live.” And what is most important in his quest of thought is “pursuing the greatest absurdity and task of the era.” He thinks the three pillars constituting the identity of Japanese people are “worship of the West, the imperial ideology, and disdain of Asia.” The worship of the West and disdain of Asia are the two sides of a coin, which are rooted in discrimination and prejudice against the heterogeneous others. The imperial system, “forming the nucleus of Japanese nationalism asserting uniqueness and superiority and performing the oppressive and exclusive function internally and externally,” was the mechanism that made these thoughts possible. Under this mechanism Korea and the Korean people were imprinted in the minds of the Japanese with the gloomiest and the most negative images. In this regard, Japanese imperialism and Korean issues are mutually interrelated and form the core of modern Japanese thought.

2009-08-27

