

Book Reviews

Volume 18 Number 2

December 2015

The Review of Korean Studies

www.kci.go.kr

Fighting for the Enemy: Koreans in Japan's War 1937-1945, by Brandon Palmer. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013. 272 pp., US\$ 30.00, ISBN 9780295992587 (paperback)

The pioneering scholarly inquiries on the subject of Korean soldiers and forced laborers in the World War Two were done by Korean as well as Japanese historians, starting with Park Kyong-Shik in 1965, Miyata Tetsuko, Kobayashi Hideo, Totsuka Hideo, Utsumi Aiko, and Yamada Shoji during the 1970s and 1980s. Korean historical remembrance of the colonial era in this immediate post-colonial period was dominated by a sense of historical injustice and driven by nationalistic viewpoints. The drafted soldiers and forced laborers depicted in these studies, inevitably, remained a group of passive nameless statistics contained in a codified binary image of concentration camp slave labor suffering under the Japanese imperial war machine.

It was in the post-Cold War 1990s, simultaneously with the emerging critical spirit of the newly democratizing South Korea after 1987, that a renewed effort to redress the wrong-doings and injustices of the twentieth century East Asian history began to re-examine and redefine victimhood in a more individual human rights-oriented perspective. Following the 90s' truth-findings of the Comfort Woman issues, the more recent 2000s have seen many studies focused on the forced labor issues, including of soldiers as well as civilian employees, focusing on more complex and accurate narratives. Oral histories have contributed remarkably to these findings, recovering the previously untold individual experiences and responses in wartime. The revisionist inquiries based on these new people-oriented findings have often contested with the overly generalized conventional nationalistic narratives.

Brandon Palmer's monograph, *Fighting for the Enemy: Koreans in Japan's War, 1937-1945*, is a case in point. It is not easy reading, but an excellent quality scholarly inquiry in the line of English-language counter-narratives on the wartime Korean experiences, and of Korean Colonial Studies in the United States since the 1990s, including the studies of Eckert, Shin, Lynn, Caprio, Sorenson, Ha, and J. Kim. It is well researched with a skillful synthesizing of a broad body of material in both Japanese and Korean, written and oral histories, official documents, and personal histories, and comes up with more objective and nuanced interpretations. The portrait Palmer presents is much

more realistic and is a densely organized enriched analysis of both Korean and Japanese responses to the wartime mobilization.

The recurring conceptual theme for analysis is the evolving changes in the relations between colonial state and Korean populace, both elites and ordinary people. The author tries to revise the conventional collective historical memory on the topic with more complex personal experiences and memory of individuals who survived the war. He takes the new approach of contextualizing the Korean volunteer and conscripted soldiers, who were typically the elite youth of the society, in the general forced labor mobilization. By this unique organization, Palmer succeeds in bringing out more realistically the complex forms of Korean responses, not only of the ordinary people, but also of the colonial Korean elites, and the middle- and lower-level “collaborators” like students and their families, village leaders, Korean policemen, and recruiting agents. Koreans’ responses were a very complex mixture of compliance, collaboration, and resistance. Starting with his title *Fighting for the Enemy*, he frequently reminds us that most colonized peoples stood to gain more at a national level if their colonial masters lost, and this was the hidden paradox for both the colonial state and the Korean population during what the Japanese still call Asia-Pacific War. War was a savage affair which revealed crucial shortcomings and vulnerabilities of all sides: the colonial state, the Korean people, and, most of all, the Japanese empire of which Korea was only a part. The complex responses of both the colonial state and the Korean people to this ironical wartime emergency structure is the heart of the book and the book successfully presents that complexity.

The volume is divided into four sections: **1. Korea’s Mobilization in Context; 2. The Korean Volunteer Soldier Systems; 3. The Korean Conscription System; and 4. Mobilization of Colonial Labor.** Chapters 1-3 illuminate the changing powers relation between the colonial state and Korean society before and after 1937. Palmer focuses on why the military mobilization took so long, and was slow and gradual: thirty months between the announcement of the draft (May 1942) and the actual enlistment of Koreans (December 1944) and proceeded in three stages: propaganda, educational training, and administrative reforms. He views this seemingly hesitant process as a demonstration of the limits of the colonial government’s power over Korean society by 1937, even after 27 years of Korea became a colony. The Government General of Korea realized belatedly that the Korean population was ill-prepared to enter the

Japanese military, largely due to the colonial administration's own pre-war policies, including a terribly neglected educational system or even a basic national registration system. With serious concerns over Korean's loyalty, Japanese language and even physical ability, as well as educational level, plus the potential for rebellion, the Japanese authorities felt they had to move cautiously, shrouding new policies in a piecemeal approach until the final defeat. In other words, in contrast to European colonial powers and the Americans in the Philippines, Japan was hesitant to use its colonial subjects as soldiers until forced to do so by the desperation of defeat after defeat in the field. European colonial troops from India, Africa, and East Asia fought in major campaigns in WWI.

In Chapter Two, examining the process of coercive recruiting and deployment, by using carefully selected oral histories, the author tries to bring up the untold stories of who, how, and in what way and to what extent the recruiting process was carried out. The process had a meager result in the end with only around 24,000 enlisted, including 3,900 "student volunteer" soldiers. In sum, Palmer made his argument as follows:

...[The] Volunteer military system revealed that, despite the seemingly coercive power of the colonial regime, the colonial government lacked the legal means to force Koreans to volunteer. The portrayal of the Government General in Korea as holding absolute power over Korea needs to be replaced by a more textured and nuanced picture. (90-91)

Although it remained as a scattered, fragmentary attempt, the author endeavors to compare the Korean case in the global practice of wartime mobilization of colonial peoples, which has been often pointed out as a much needed but often neglected step in the field. How to interpret this point is up to debate, however, the single salient point came out in the observation that the Koreans were integrated into regular Japanese units, unlike the segregation of the Euro-American colonial armies. Another problem of the scattered and fragmentary nature of Korean enlistment is in the statistical materials available on the topic, and clearly Palmer also struggled with this crucial shortcoming.

It seems that he relied more on Higuchi Yuichi's most recent estimates of approximately 210,000 Koreans who served as soldiers and approximately 150,000 as "military civilians," making a total of 363,465 Koreans in the

military, of which around 51,000 (14%) died or went missing in action. Some estimates claimed between 286,000 and 367,000 or as low as 135,000 total in the military. The total for labor mobilized to work in the civilian sector also varies from 670,000 to 800,000. To put this in the whole picture of the Japanese war machine, Palmer points out that the Japanese military composed primarily of Japanese swelled from 3.7 million (1943) to 5.38 Million (1944), and to 7.2 million by August 1945.

The compulsive, self-deceiving quality of the assimilation policy demonstrated in the drafting process, and responses of the Korean public was the theme of Chapter 3. The Korean response was by and large begrudging acquiescence and resignation but including a determined non-cooperation. Koreans reacted with a complex mixture of compliance, collaboration, and resistance. Koreans felt disgusted by the ever more haphazard, hypocritical (because covering up Japan's hopeless defeat and absolute manpower shortage), and blatant bureaucratic coercion. The Korean Conscription System was not, Palmer shows, the real intention of the Tokyo and colonial governments. Lacking faith in the Korean populace and not wanting to empower large numbers of Koreans with military skills, the government preferred to mobilize Koreans as laborers. His analysis of Koreans' exploiting the colonial state's vulnerability, which was of the regime's own making until the late-1930s, reveals a good understanding of the hidden paradox of its brand of colonialism when Japan's survival was at stake.

The final Chapter 4 (pp. 139-82) was difficult and rather dense reading, for it is a condensed organization of many available recent secondary sources on the topic. It was also a very thought-provoking and complex analysis leaving many important issues in the reader's mind afterwards: a new perspective of the imperial power vs. the subaltern diaspora group; the wartime corporatist state-society structure filled with many semi-official organizations like the National Service Corps (Kunlopokukdae), the Women's Volunteer Corps (Chongshindae), the Patriotic Wives' Association (Aekukpuinhoe), and the Patriotic Unit (Aekukban); middle-lower level recruiting agents in the local labor offices; and upper-class Koreans who demonstrated strong non-cooperation in the mobilization process. He provides brief explanations of civilian employees of the military, POW guards, Korean policemen, and recruiters, suggesting that the collaboration issue and the inner division of Korean society not by nationality but by class are future issues. The comfort

women issue is missing in the discussion, understandably due to its politicized nature. Another issue missed was the national and political consciousness raising among Koreans an effect of watching the weaknesses of the colonial regime and Japanese empire.

In sum, the author succeeds in presenting a complex, but more accurate and realistic picture of the wartime experience of Koreans as individuals in colonial Korea. Rather than depicting the colonial government as simply an evil totalitarian regime, he reveals a short-sighted administration caught in a desperate global war Japan was losing and unprepared for a major change in policy. Koreans' responses were also depicted as a complex mixture of compliance, collaboration, and resistance. I agreed with most of his analysis and interpretations as fair, based on good research and analysis. It will be a rare treat for not only the English readership on WWII in the Korean setting, but also for Korean and Japanese readers, especially graduate students in both countries and elsewhere, suggesting many future issues for inquiry. This book is a model of a thorough and painstaking research methodology producing objective and balanced interpretations and narratives.

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