Abstract

Purpose: This article is to explore to understand the realistic background of the territorial conflicts, it has limitations in the understanding and resolution of the territorial conflicts at a more fundamental level regarding the humanities approach. In this respect, it is important to analyze the unresolved territorial conflicts based on the literary view from a humanistic approach based on a political and cultural perspective rather than a confrontation based on the logic of power.

Method: The humanities approach is especially literature, contains the conflict generation and resolution process at the human level. The literary works representing each country, especially novels and tales, uniquely demonstrate the origin and development of the conflicts through their own plots. Based on which, it will be possible to understand how the territorial disputes will develop by country at the cultural level.

Results: This article has not suggested a fundamental resolution for the territorial conflicts of Northeast Asia, and especially the historical issues of Dokdo between South Korea and Japan. However, it is important to take a humanistic approach focusing on the literary works as ideological, economic, cultural, and nationalist conflicts. This is because the memory of intersecting harms and damages as ideological, economic, cultural, and nationalist confrontations are repeated with a focus on the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria are the factors that continue the conflict.

Conclusion: As the historical contexts are different, the cultural and psychological tendencies are also unique, and the territorial disputes develop through the combination of such factors. In order to analyze the collective psychology and conflict of the South Koreans who experienced the loss of sovereignty and division due to Japan’s forced annexation, and the territorial and historical issues surrounding the Island of Dokdo, which has been an obstacle to the normalization of the South Korea-Japan relations to this day, the culture of the time literature works dealing with modern and contemporary history that reflect the culture and language have been considered.

Keywords: Territorial Conflicts of Northeast Asia, Humanities Approach, Community of Memory, Inherent Conflicts Between Korea and Japan, Collective Perception of South Korean

1. Introduction

From the 19th century to the present, political and diplomatic disputes have not ceased in Northeast Asia given the unresolved territorial conflicts. After Japan’s Meiji Restoration, Japan accelerated its modernization, and there was no country that had not suffered a large-scaled war with Japan in all conflicts in Northeast Asia towards the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries[1]. In Northeast Asia, political and diplomatic disputes has continued given the unresolved territorial disputes which arose during the 19th century. Most of the researches on the territorial disputes have been limitations in the understanding and resolution of the territorial conflicts at the fundamental level.
There has been a territorial conflict between China and Japan over Diaoyu Dao (Senkaku Islands in Japanese), Russia and Japan over the Four Southern Kuril Islands (Northern Territory in Japanese), and South Korea and Japan over Dokdo (Takeshima in Japanese). While territorial conflicts are a problem between the individual countries, it is also true that a macroscopic understanding of Northeast Asia is needed to resolve the intertwined territorial disputes [2]. Each and every time territorial and historical conflicts arose, the countries in Northeast Asia, except for Japan, have voiced the same criticism despite acute differences in terms of their interests among realistic countries.

As such, the previous studies conducted on the territorial conflicts including South Korea and other Northeast Asian countries (Japan, China, and Russia) were primarily developed in terms of history, politics, and diplomacy. Some of the most representative studies of the territorial conflicts in Northeast Asia in Korea and overseas are as follows. John J Stephen J, The Kuril Islands (1974); Andrew Mack and Martin O’Hare, “Moscow-Tokyo and the Northern Territories Dispute,” Asian Survey (1990); Okuyama Yukata, “The Dispute over the Kurile Islands between Russia and Japan in the 1990s,” Pacific Affairs (2003); Palm Coast, “Japan’s New Nationalism—Ever Since World War II,” Foreign Affairs (2003); Valencia Mark “Domestic Politics Fuels Northeast Asian Maritime Disputes,” Asia Pacific Issues (2000); Woon-do Choi, “Nationalism and Territorial Disputes,” Northeast Asian Historical Issues (2011); Dong-myeong Kim, Territorial Disputes and International Cooperation (2014); Ji-won Yun, South Korea’s National Security & Diplomacy in the Global Era: Challenge and Vision (2019) [3][4][5][6][7][8][9][10].

Most of such previous studies have demonstrated that the political approach is appropriate for analyzing the reality of the territorial conflicts of Northeast Asia, where the diplomacy of power and economic cooperation intersect. It is important that the historical context and political and military conflicts contribute to strengthening one’s position. In this context, this article is a humanistic approach taken based on a political and cultural point of view and analyzes it with a focus on literary perspective. In this respect, mainly this article is to deal with the modern and contemporary history of the South Koreans’ collective awareness and conflict with the territorial issues surrounding the Island of Dokdo <Figure 1> and the historical issues between South Korea and Japan, which experienced the loss of sovereignty and division due to Japan’s forced annexation.

Figure 1. Korean island, Dokdo.

Note: https://blog.naver.com/monikadroth/222405287929 (June 21, 2023).

2. Historical Conflicts of Territorial Conflicts in Northeast Asia

After the defeat of the Crimean War (1854-1855), Russia advanced into Asia full fledgedly to gain an ice free port. In this process, collisions with China and Japan were inevitable. In China,
it was important for Russia to promote the modernization movement and nationalism that emerged in the process of the invasion of interests by the imperialist powers that deepened from the end of the 19th century. In particular, in the process of confronting the Japanese aggression, Manchuria was transformed into a multi-layered region where nationalism, socialism, and imperialism collide[11][12].

The unique names of ‘Manchuria,’ ‘Siberia,’ and ‘Korean Peninsula,’ which were the spaces of acute confrontation in the 20th century, exist as the spaces of common wounds, conflicts and remorse where the memory of countless people from the past to the present are buried. The repeated territorial conflicts of Northeast Asia have always resulted in political conflict or military competition because they have insisted on or impose their own national interests on the other countries[13].

The power to relocate Manchuria, which was a space of remorse and dreams for the Koreans who dreamed of independence during the colonial period, to a symbolic space of reconciliation in Northeast Asia, would also originate from the respect for the wounds of others. Furthermore, with the mobilization of the state, which was one of the pillars of modernity, the people of Northeast Asian countries in the 20th century are remembered as a space where they share the scars of war, mobilization, and colonial rule. To further elaborate, historically, from the beginning of the 20th century, China, Russia, and Korea had have to experience major collisions and territorial aggressions with Japan. In particular, after the Sino-Japanese War(1894-1895), the Russo-Japanese War(1904-1905), and World War II, China, Korea and Russia in Northeast Asia all experienced warfare with Japan, and suffered enormous human and material damages in the process. Even to this day, the historical recognition and historical issues could not avoid continuous collisions, and it has been a major factor in confrontation and dispute between countries and between peoples. Unfortunately, after the end of World War II and the defeat of Japan, due to the conflicts between liberal democracy and socialist ideology, the Northeast Asian countries have had to fight each other as ‘enemy’ due to the Korean War(1950-1953). Unfortunately, the Korean War became a tragedy in which China, the former Soviet Union, and Korea, which had fought together with Japan, had to retaliate against each other as enemies[14].

Under a large framework, the main factors of the territorial conflicts of Northeast Asia are classified into a number of ancillary issues such as the clearing of the past history, history textbooks, territorial conflicts, and the other countries’ political leadership and people’s tendencies.

Seong-woo Kwon(1999) defined that ‘literature and history are a kind of twin relationship.’ This is because many literary works are not entirely free from the historical contexts. Even if it is a creative and extraordinary imagination, its concrete form is connected to the state in which the real world and historical aspects are reversed[15]. Heon-young Yim(2014) claimed that such conflicts and issues could be solved secondarily if the past history problems are properly resolved. In this sense, Northeast Asia will not be able to resolve the current chain of conflicts unless Japan, which is a party to the aggression, does not properly resolve its past history based on the peaceful and humanitarian principles[16].

3. Origin of Anti-Japanese Sentiment and Conflicts Memory towards Manchuria

As noted earlier, to remember the past is to travel back in time towards ‘history’ and encounter the present again, and hence, ‘remembering’ would never be a static act such as self-reflection or retrospection. Hwa-seon Kim(2005) said, “This was why it is necessary to recall the painful memory of piecing together the fragmented past in order to understand the trauma of the present. This was the modern meaning of the act of remembering the past, and the politically of the past as it is live”[17].

Since the late 19th century, the conflicts China and Japan, and Russia and Japan have all been the conflicts for the domination of Chosun. The experiences from the late 19th century to the
early 20th century, when they were treated as spoils of the struggle for superiority between great powers, but could not even resist, acted as a great wound to the inside of the Koreans. The modern era, which was met by external shocks after the opening of port in 1876, was a difficult one for the Koreans. As the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War from the second half of the 19th century, the Koreans’ perception of Japan as the formula of modernization equaled to westernization becomes unstable and uncomfortable. Daehan Maeil Daily, a representative newspaper of Chosun at the time, recorded the Japanese as follows:

_In our view, it was natural for a country like Japan to rise to a high position very fast and must be proud, and thinks itself to stand shoulder to shoulder with other powers, and to be better than any other country. There was no doubt that now, Japan’s pride would be educated by the efficacy of winning the unwise Anglo-Japanese alliance and the Russo-Japanese war. “See, you the Japanese people. Now, I declared that annexing Korea was by no means an advantage, and that, no matter how much you tried to satisfy your greed, Korea would never fall”._ 

As recorded in Daehan Maeil Daily, the Koreans at the time regarded the Japanese as a proud and distrustful people. This recognition was expressed in a way that repeatedly emphasized the superiority of our people and history. However, no matter how intense the hostility and hatred towards Japan, which had subdued and encroached on the neighboring powers based on a meticulous plan, it was not enough to protect its territory and sovereignty. Primarily the modern nationalism in Korea was formed in the process of imitating and excluding the other, primarily Japan. A serious sense of crisis and a strong sense of nationalism were the two sides of the same coin. Hence, in order to inquire on the factors that strengthened the nationalist consciousness, it would first be necessary to examine the cause of the sense of crisis that caused it.

Chosun was forcibly annexed by Japan in 1910, and the suffering was too large for the Koreans. At the time, the following two concepts were established inside the Chosun people who met the contemporary era as follows:

_The modern(present) era was ‘me(subject)’ and ‘another(another person)’ approaching ‘me’, and the other was ‘new good (modern, western)’ and ‘old bad(feudal, traditional)’ as a matter of concept. The two different stemmed intersect each other to form a number of possible paradigms(...) The modern era emerged vaguely as a sign of escaping from the nightmare of oppression and barbarism(...) ‘Efflorescence’ and the paradigm of improvement and enlightenment had changed into something that should offer more power._

The longer the colonial rule by the Japanese imperialists, the more the worldview of the survival of the fittest took root among the Koreans, and the economic and social oppression of the colonial situation accelerated it. The dichotomy of resistance versus cooperation did not allow for the delicacy of staring at class, gender and race. For example, the trains during the Japanese colonial period were both a blessing of the modern civilization and a prelude to imperialist violence. The railways built by Japan were not only a passageway to the modern civilization, but also a passageway to extort the blood and sweat of the people. The colonial people parted from the pre-modern mythical world while riding the train, wonderfully gazing at the panoramic landscape of the modern civilization through the window of their room, and being thrown into the imperialist reality of exploitation and violence like a baggage. Likely it was the case. For the Koreans, the railroad is a dangerous and fascinating race that crosses modernity and colonialism, and has been interpreted as a compressed modern historical symbol experienced by the Korean society.

As Jongh-yeon Jung(2005) noted “Manchuria was realistically a life sphere for the Koreans during the Japanese colonial period, and historically it was a space imprinted with the reality of the nation in a state of exile, and politically it was the origin of resistance against Japanese
Empire.” Conversely it was also a land of opportunity for successful migration under the protection of Japan. It was not only domination and resistance under the colonial empire. In many cases, the relationship between domination and control coexisted with domination and resistance as well as assimilation and repulsion, and it was difficult to distinguish [22]. Yang-soo Kim (2004) said in regards to Manchuria that was the most important space for the Japanese imperialism to stand shoulder to shoulder with the western modern civilization, and Manchuria’s material wealth and advanced western culture were all the share of the Japanese, and Chinese and Koreans in Manchuria where all marginalized, merely forming the peripheries of the material wealth [23].

If one examines some literary works recorded based on the memory of Korea focused on Manchuria, one could discover the possibility of creating a small crack in the harsh reality and emotions. Set in Manchuria in the 1930s, Yeon-soo Kim’s ‘Night Sings’ marked one reflect on the common tragic reality experienced by Korea and even China. ‘Night Sings’ was a work of conflict between the former Soviet Union, China, Japan, and the Koreans. The novel was set in Manchuria in the 1930s. This novel dealt with the ‘Minsaengdan Incident’ which occurred between the Chinese and Koreans in Manchuria at the time who cooperated in the development of anti-Japanese independence. The migration of the Koreans to Manchuria began in the mid to late 19th century, and with the exile in 1910, Manchuria emerged as an important area and region for the Korean national history. Thereafter, in the thought of colonial Koreans, Manchuria had become a space that represents various implications [24].

4. Effect on Collective Memory and Perception of South Korean

After the liberation, through the war and military dictatorship, the worldview of ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘law of the jungle’ was internalized increasingly and blatantly, and it has been expressed as a driving force that continuously pressured the people. Combined with the violence of the ruling power, the driving force increasingly gained acceleration. The development of capitalism has been also made visible following the emergence of a sensuous and fantastic world of commodities that goes beyond simple physical objects [25].

Byeong-cheol Na (2016) noted that the experience of phantasmagoria of the displayed product was the emergence of a new spectacle value that goes beyond the exchange value as well as the use value of the product itself. The emergence of the modern world has been visibly materialized by such a spectacular exhibition. However, this was actually an action of invisible emotional power that endlessly seduces people while hiding the social relationships behind the product. The crowd forgets about the relationship between the capitalist and the worker who produced the product and the relationship in the distribution process, and was drawn to the illusionary experience that the arcade creates. For such reason, the modern visionary experience was inevitably dualistic. Capitalism and the world of commodities endlessly tempt us, yet behind the scenes were the contradictions that were difficult to resolve. The modern illusionary experience fascinates us, and at the same time, unconsciously accompanies anxiety, boredom, and depression [26].

As such, as noted by Byeong-cheol Na (2016), it would not be incorrect to say that the history of Korea after its liberation was the ‘process of consistently becoming more ornate.’ In order to avoid the anxiety, boredom, and depression that deepen as the fantasies become more glamorous, we chose ‘galloping.’ Young-min Kim (2016) noted this galloping phenomenon as follows:

Certain violent experiences sometimes decided the fate of a country. For example, Korea had to accept the colonial rule. In the twilight of a tribute country invaded by imperialism, the imperialists who broke in said, “You did not have the capacity to create a modern public order on your own, so we would rule for you” (...) Since the primordial violence had given the Koreans a common assignment that was difficult to repel, the Koreans must exhaust the modern history by
In the process of galloping as such, Korea abandoned many things. Korea’s industrial modernization after the Korean War was a continuation of the developmental projects and the process of mobilizing cheap and replaceable labor. The places where the rapid economic development projects and the exploitative labor force were most evident were the battlefields. After the liberation, the territorial perception projected in the Korean literature primarily did not take on the form of direct conflict or physical occupation, but was transformed into a form of controlling, managing, and subsuming the body and interior of a subject inferior to themselves. Sometimes in the reverse direction, those who wish to be seized and managed by others in exchange for willingly giving up their subjectivity often appear in the Korean literature. For example, in Seok-young Hwang’s novels ‘Tower’ dealing with the Vietnam War, the contradiction of developmentalism combined with militarism was well expressed. In ‘Tower,’ a short story from the author’s Vietnam War experience, the story of a South Korean military unit that was annihilated while protecting a temple in Vietnam at the request of the U.S. military appeared. It clearly visualized that for the U.S. military, the lives of the soldiers of allies of the East were merely mobilizable and replaceable materials[28][29].

As a result, the Koreans who survived through the colonial oppression reproduced their own experiences of colonialism by oppressing and ignoring the minorities. Naturally, such reproductions, remnants of colonialism, were not exclusive to the Korean literature. The power to relocate Manchuria, which was a space of remorse and dreams for the Koreans who dreamed of achieving independence during the colonial period, to a symbolic space of reconciliation in Northeast Asia, will also come from the respect for the wounds of others. This is because understanding others becomes possible only by recognizing the other person’s wounds[30][31].

5. Conclusion

As noted earlier, literature carries and reflects the process of conflict generation and resolution at the human level. Based on which, it would also be possible to understand how the territorial conflicts would develop in each country at the cultural level. Thus, the policies on the territorial issues have not largely escaped national boundaries and desires. Each country has not given up its political and economic gains, and the arms race to occupy an advantageous position in the conflict has continued, and further demonstrates a dual attitude of maintaining cooperation and exchanges despite the strategic diplomatic frictions[32][33].

This has been because each country’s unique ‘memory’ exist at the foundation of such attitude. From the end of the 19th century to the present, the conflicts caused by territorial disputes in Northeast Asia have been among the most important conflict factors between countries. China, which had been reduced to a semi-colonial state in the west, underwent a long war with Japan and suffered from tremendous damages. As emphasized earlier, Manchuria was a key space of the Northeast Asian conflicts such as the Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War, the anti-Japanese independence movement, and the Sino-Japanese War[34].

Specifically once the discussions or debates begin with the historical facts of the Island of Dokdo’s territorial conflicts between South Korea and Japan presented, the vicious cycle has been repeated itself where the issue of interpretation grows and the interpretation ends up in the logic of power[35]. Constantly South Korea has been at odds with Japan, recalling the unresolved memory of the colonial rule. Perhaps it has been because the remembrances of the inner being dominated for so long is far more tenacious and stronger than the loss of actual territory. The issue of interpretation of the historical facts about the territorial disputes between South Korea and Japan, or between Japan and Northeast Asian countries, will likely remain unresolved for a longer period of time.
6. References

6.1. Journal articles


6.2. Books


6.3. Additional references


7. Appendix

7.1. Author’s contribution

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