

Dilemmas of Identity and Community

Japanese settlers in Korea in the late 19th and the early 20th Century

TOYOSHIMA, Shino

In 1876 Korea was opened as a result of the Treaty of Kanghwa. The Korean government opened ports, and Japanese migration into these open ports began. Japanese settlers were engaged in community building in these open ports during the time period which paralleled to Japan's colonial expansion into Korea. As a result, until Korea was liberated in 1945, Japanese settlers formed one of the largest colonial communities in the twentieth century. This paper looks into the way in which the community was constructed by Japanese settlers, focusing on the formation period during the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. In particular, it seeks to look into the dilemmas which Japanese settlers came across, as people from different native places in Japan with various backgrounds came together in Korea. That is how people's personal interests interfered with the collective project to build the community, and yet their struggles played a significant role in advancing the community's development. In this paper the case of Kunsan¹ in North Chōlla Province in present day South Korea will be examined. It looks into the episodes of the early settler community illustrated in a book, *Kunsan kaikō-shi* (The history of the opening of Kunsan port), written in 1925 by a Japanese resident in Kunsan, in which he highlights the interchanges of the early settler leaders to represent the history of the community's development.

The General Foreign Settlement and the Tsushima clique

Japanese migration began in Kunsan after the opening of the port in 1899. Immediately after the opening of the port, the Japanese government established a branch office of the Japanese consulate of Mokp'o, and appointed Asayama Kenzō from Tsushima as a consul to look after the administration of Japanese settlers. The Korean government established a General Foreign Settlement for the foreign residents to settle down. Whereas in the case of other major ports in Korea, in which the settlements often took the form of concession and were founded exclusively for Japanese residents, a General Foreign Settlement was intended for residents from different nations to share the same territory. In the case of the latter, the General Foreign Settlement Association was constituted by the members who represented each nation and carried out the community

governance. In the case of Kunsan, however, the Japanese monopolised the General Foreign Settlement Association, since other foreign communities were either too small in size, or had abandoned their rights to take part in the community governance. Additionally, apart from the General Foreign Settlement Association, the Japanese settlers established the Japanese Association with a view to making it an autonomous body for the Japanese community.

The Japanese Consul represented the General Foreign Settlement Association together with a few people who he had chosen among the Japanese settlers. Similarly, the Japanese Association was established with the Japanese Consulate as its office, and was constituted by voluntary members from the upper middle class, with the Japanese Consul as the central figure. The Japanese settlers' community building in Kunsan took place under the peculiar environment created under the General Foreign Settlement, in which three institutions, the General Foreign Settlement Association, the Japanese Consulate and the Japanese Association, came to be engaged in community governance. More precisely, the persona and the personal interests of the each individual who came to be involved in the respective institutions played a major role in advancing the community's development. In particular, those of the Japanese Consul exerted a major influence over the course of the community's development. His interest was particularly centred around an identity based on his native place, Tsushima, which is a small island situated between the coast of Fukuoka and Pusan. As soon as the news of Asayama's taking the position in the Japanese Consulate in Kunsan spread in Korea, people from Tsushima, who had been in other parts of Korea then, started to gather in Kunsan, in a hope that they might benefit from Asayama's support. As a result people from Tsushima began to constitute a relatively large population in Kunsan, and collectively, they emerged as major players in the Japanese settler community.²

People from Tsushima had a peculiar background, particularly in relation to Korea. Tsushima's geographical position meant it had developed close cultural and economic relationships in pre-modern period. During the Tokugawa

period, a team of translators of Korean language served the Shogunate in its diplomacy with the Korean dynasty. Amongst people from Tsushima who came to Kunsan were those who had spent many years in Korea and had a good command of the Korean language and an in-depth knowledge of the customs and cultures of Korea.³ Additionally, with many years of experience in Korea, they had acquired particular communication skills in dealing with local Koreans.⁴ Due to their peculiar historical background, people from Tsushima when brought on to a new stage, came to play a significant role in Japan's colonial expansion in Korea. In the case of Asayama, he had been sent to Korea by the Japanese government in 1884 as a trainee of Korean language, and meanwhile he had been working as an interpreter for the Japanese legation. Asayama was appointed to take up the position as a consul in Kunsan when the Korean government opened the port. Those who came to settle in Kunsan, also quickly adopted the local business customs of the Korean market, and expanded their businesses. Whereas the majority of Japanese settlers started businesses importing Japanese products from Japan and selling them to Japanese settlers in the General Foreign Settlement, or occasionally to Korean merchant, who came into the General Foreign Settlement for business, merchants from Tsushima particularly focused their business to the local Korean markets. They imported products which were particularly favoured by Korean consumers, and visited the local markets to carry out commercial activities. Similarly, merchants from Tsushima bought merchandises for export to Japan from the local Korean market, rather than waiting for Korean merchants to come in to the General Foreign Settlement to sell rice and local goods. Compared to the majority of Japanese merchants, people from Tsushima were able to carry out commercial activities in an extensive area.

Asayama's regional identity was particularly shown in the way he favoured people from Tsushima. For instance, he gave them special access to take up some of the major positions in the General Foreign Settlement Association. In addition, if one were to speak bad of people from Tsushima, Asayama would transform his tone of voice and raged with anger in a manner that the rest of the residents would find it hard to make sense of. Furthermore, Asayama often dismissed those who would not get along with people from Tsushima. Asayama's attention for his native place was not only presented as an expression of personal interest, but developed into a collective interest shared among the people from Tsushima, giving the rise of "Tsushima clique" in Kunsan.

As a result, the rest of the settlers began to see that people from Tsushima were becoming prominent figures in the community's governance and commercial activity because they were personally supported by Asayama.⁵ Indeed, Tsushima people went into all types of businesses, and were remarkably successful in them. Some became importers and distributors specialising in merchandises for the local Korean markets, and others became some of the first major rice exporters in Kunsan.⁶ Moreover, some started large scale farm management in Kunsan, despite the fact that they had come from a region in which rice was not grown. By forming a clique, they collectively sought to secure their privileged position in the community governance, while fulfilling their respective interests in carrying out various businesses.⁷ Consequently, people from Tsushima began to gain power and exert a major influence over the Japanese settler community in Kunsan.

The Tsushima clique and internal struggle

Asayama's favouritism triggered antipathy among people who were from other regions in Japan.⁸ At the outset, people from the main islands in Japan generally shared a sense of discriminatory feeling towards people from small islands within Japanese borders. People thought that Asayama's persona was good and gentlemanly, nonetheless "unlikely for a person from an island", but rather they understood that favouritism was a typical characteristic of islanders and therefore Asayama's favouritism for people from his native place was an inevitable consequence of his background. People accepted, nonetheless reluctantly, that the Japanese Consul's persona would exert a major influence over the community's development, however detrimental it might be, since the Japanese Consulate was the central institution in the Japanese settler community. People became distressed as they witnessed various cases which implied unless he was from Tsushima it was difficult to be recognised in Kunsan whether as a leader or a businessman.⁹ In particular, the settlers from the upper middle class, who were also concerned with community building and had voluntarily come to be involved in the community governance through the Japanese Association, had resentful feelings towards people from Tsushima.

The existing order of the community, in which Tsushima clique controlled the community governance, began to be contested as Asayama's death approached. Since Asayama's death implied the fall of Tsushima clique, people from Tsushima began to make attempts to maintain their position when Asayama fell ill.¹⁰ In doing so, the Tsushima clique, who had occupied the major positions in the General

Foreign Settlement Association, came up with an idea to form an alliance with someone who seemed powerful enough to be put forth as a representative of the Association, and make him a symbolic figure of the Association. By supporting that person, the Tsushima clique sought to benefit from his leadership and maintain their positions. Hence, they found Kadowaki from Osaka, who had initially taken up the manager's position in the Kunsan branch of a trading company based in Osaka, and subsequently became the manager of a shipping company in Kunsan.¹¹ As with the cases of people from Tsushima, in general, Kadowaki did not have an extensive educational background. People from Tsushima particularly chose Kadowaki due to his agreeable character and excellent social skills, which stood out amongst the upper middle class Japanese in the General Foreign Settlement and charmed people in the community.¹² The Tsushima clique sought to take the advantage of Kadowaki's popularity and represent their collective interests through him.

While people from Tsushima intended to secure their position by putting forth Kadowaki on to the leadership position, Kadowaki himself was also seeking for an opportunity to become a significant figure in the General Foreign Settlement through governance.¹³ Thus the alliance between the Tsushima clique and Kadowaki was able to meet the ends of both parties. Hence, they managed to take over the major positions in the General Foreign Settlement Association. After taking control of the General Foreign Settlement Association, the alliance furthermore worked out to put Kadowaki and Tsushima people into the major positions in the Japanese Association.

The Tsushima clique benefited from Kadowaki's outstanding leadership, which he came to play in both Associations, and managed to maintain its presence in the centre of the community governance. At the same time, however, their power started to be shaken since Kadowaki came into the clique. The first major incident occurred with Kadowaki's "disgrace" to the state, settler leaders and the whole community. In 1900, the Japanese royal family celebrated the birth of crown prince, and the Kunsan Japanese Association members agreed to carry out a memorial tree planting at the front yard of the Association's office on this occasion. Hence, the members spent a day out walking on a mountain near the General Foreign Settlement to look for a fine looking pine tree. After they found one, they decided to leave the tree there until the day of the ceremony. So they marked the tree so that they could easily recognise it when they came back to get it. In due time, they

came to look for the tree, only to find that the marked tree was gone. The members assumed that it was some mischief done by evil Koreans, and simply left the place that day. After a few days, however, there was a rumour that the tree was planted in the backyard of Kadowaki's residence. The Japanese Association sent a young member, Chiba, to investigate the situation. According to the report, the tree planted in Kadowaki's garden was indeed the tree that the members had selected and marked, and it turned out that Kadowaki had gone to the mountain on his own, and uprooted the tree to transplant it to his garden.

Kadowaki was simply tempted by his personal interest which had little to do with his position in the Japanese Association. However, the incident became detrimental for his career in the community governance.¹⁴ The members assembled an emergency meeting to discuss the issue. Everyone agreed that what Kadowaki had done was a disgrace to the Japanese Association, and thus it should not be overlooked. Kadowaki explained that he had transplanted the tree to his garden so that the tree would be safe until the day of the ceremony. However, his claim was dismissed. Moreover, some members even proposed to report this issue to Asayama, and have Kadowaki deported from Korea. Asayama was too ill to look into the matter, and thus Kadowaki was able to remain in Kunsan. However, the accusation against Kadowaki did not cease, and eventually he was compelled to leave the position in the Japanese Association.¹⁵

The Tsushima clique tried to cover Kadowaki's fault in an attempt to maintain their power in community governance. As a result, the residents began to feel disagreeable feelings towards the community governance led by Kadowaki and the Tsushima clique. Since the Tsushima clique had formed an alliance with Kadowaki, the settlers assumed that any personal issue of theirs that was associated with the General Foreign Settlement was linked to conspiracy of the alliance. At the same time, however, fragmentation of the alliance was an inevitable consequence, particularly after Kadowaki's pine tree incident. The clique was divided internally by the distrust caused by the incident, while it had to confront against the external criticism.

Fragmentation

Kadowaki's pine tree incident became a crucial point in the course of the community's development, as it brought various issues on to the public arena. It was also the beginning of what was later being called "Kunsan conflict". The conflict started with a criticism of Kadowaki's presence

in the General Foreign Settlement Association, since he had remained in the public position even after he had left the position in the Japanese Association. People's distaste towards the Tsushima clique and Kadowaki burst in the winter of 1901, as people claimed that elections should be carried out for the members of the General Foreign Settlement Association. The election was initially carried out as a challenge to wipe out the Tsushima clique and Kadowaki from the General Foreign Settlement Association. Hence, from this time onwards, election developed into major events and became an arena in which battles were carried out among the settler leaders alongside the selection of representatives of the Associations.

Meanwhile, Kadowaki tried to restore his reputation, and made efforts to bring a bank in Kunsan. In 1902 Kunsan had a good harvest in contrast to the previous year. To make up for the past two years' stagnation, the Japanese Association sought to establish a bank in Kunsan. He managed to make use of his business connections in Japan and other cities in Korea, and achieved the establishment of a branch of the Dai-Ichi Bank in Kunsan in 1903. Since the bank was an urgent issue for the settlers in Kunsan, the whole community overjoyed with this event. As a result Kadowaki was able to compensate for his error in the past, and managed to make a reappearance in the leadership position in the Japanese Association by winning in an election.

Kadowaki confronted various challenges, internally and externally. On coming back to the position, he sought a supporter, independent from the Tsushima clique, and appointed Chiba, who was from his native place, Osaka. However, Kadowaki's ambition was deceived by the people who he had tried to work together with, since these people also had other interests than being engaged in community governance. Kadowaki's was indeed let down by Chiba, as Kadowaki and Chiba did not get along, and the two often clashed. Chiba was young, and had just finished his education at a state middle school in Osaka. He had first come to Mokp'o and worked for a newspaper company based in Mokp'o. He then moved to Kunsan, due to friction within his former workplace. Chiba was not interested in the position, to begin with, but was seeking an opportunity to establish a newspaper company based in Kunsan while he was in the office at the Japanese Association. Kadowaki, was also seeking to get involved in the media. His intention was to promote himself to the people within the community and also outside the community, with a view to restoring his reputation from the faults he had done in the past. In doing so he was seeking to issue a Kunsan edition of the Chōsen

shinbun, a newspaper company based in Keijō. Whereas Chiba was expected to support Kadowaki in carrying out this project, Chiba established his own newspaper company, Hannan-shinpō (South Korea daily), during Kadowaki's business trip to Keijo to negotiate over this issue with the chair of the Chōsen shinbun. Kadowaki raged at Chiba's establishment of the Hannan-shinpō. Chiba, as he had been planning, resigned from the position in the Japanese Association in due course. After Chiba left, Kadowaki invited a young man, Koyama, from Keijo and put him in the position of representative of the Japanese Association as a replacement. Similarly, Koyama was not interested in the position, and indeed turned out to be incapable of looking after the administration. He invited geisha to his room in the Japanese Association building, and spent his pastime indulging himself with music and pleasure. The community was appalled by his behaviour. In the meantime the treasurer of the Japanese Association ran away with the Association's money, when he was impelled to resign from the position.

In the Japanese Association's election of 1904, three businessmen in rice trade and Chiba formed an alliance to challenge Kadowaki and the Tsushima clique. Kadowaki fought with support of the Dai-Ichi Bank. He made individual home visits to the residents to promote himself, whereas his counterparts used the Hannan shinpō as a means to promote themselves. Hannan shinpō wrote an article to introduce the conspiracy between Kadowaki and the Tsushima clique. The media played a major role in bringing the election to the attention of the public and increased people's enthusiasm. In reaction to the article and the public responses, other local newspapers accordingly featured the battle. The battle that took place through the media became intensified, and an article by the Hannan shinpō resulted in provoking violence by a member in Kadowaki's party against a journalist of the Hannan shinpō at a restaurant. The election battle was concluded as Kadowaki acknowledged his defeat and withdrew from the candidate position before the actual election took place. Consequently the Japanese Association was taken over by new representatives, a team of rice traders. Kadowaki's regime thus ended, and indeed the Tsushima clique failed to maintain its power, which had already become evident since Kadowaki had been brought into the clique.

With the dissolution of the Tsushima clique and its alliance with Kadowaki, it seemed as if the problem in the community governance was resolved. However, tension in the community persisted. A dispute occurred between the Japanese Settler Association and the General Foreign

Settlement Association over the case of a community's hospital. The issue was that whereas the Japanese Association had purchased a piece of land to establish a hospital in Kunsan, the General Foreign settlement Association had rejected the Japanese Association's plan and provided a subsidy to a private hospital and made it into a semi-public institution. Meanwhile, in addition to the hospital issue, a key member of the Japanese Association left Kunsan, and the selection of the new leader became a pressing issue. However, people argued over who to choose as a leader, which people struggled to reach the conclusion.

In sum, the Japanese settler community continued to confront with difficulties in coming together, as it embedded dilemmas of individuals, institutions and people's interests which constantly shifted between the public and private. People, on the one hand, tried to represent the individual through the public institution, and on the other hand, used the public institution to benefit their individual interests. Community building, nonetheless, was the central issue which underlay all the issues and actions which occurred during this time. During the course of time, the disputes and interchanges among the settler leaders eventually became an issue to be shared among the general public. A sequence of disputes and conflicts, therefore, played a significant role in advancing the community's development. However,

problems remained unsolved, but came to a temporary conclusion, when the construction of a new school building arose as an agenda. The school issue provided the settlers with a clue on how education might be used as a driving force to mobilise people for a collective project in the next phase of community building.

Notes

1. Kunsan was opened in 1899 as a commercial port to conduct rice trade between Korea and Japan.
2. Hodaka Masanori, *Kunsan kaikō-shi*, (Hodaka Masanori: Kunsan, 1925), 63.
3. *Ibid.*, 64.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, 63.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 64.
10. *Ibid.*, 65.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, 104.
15. *Ibid.*, 103-104.

とよしま しの / PhD student, SOAS, University of London