

Japan, S. Korea Should Discuss Takeshima Issue

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Our special committee on territorial issues at the Liberal Democratic Party made a plan to send a team to South Korea's Ulleungdo Island. The team's purpose was to visit the Dokdo Museum on the island to explore South Korean view on the territorial issue surrounding Takeshima Island, called Dokdo in South Korea, which is Japan's inherent territory but is effectively controlled by South Korea. After the visit, the team planned to exchange views with Korean politicians and scholars. The plan for LDP lawmakers was seen as having no problems.

I decided to join the team in early July. The other team members were members of House of Representatives Yoshitaka Shindo and Katsuei Hirasawa, and House of Councilors legislator Masahisa Sato. Some two weeks before our planned tour, protests against us intensified in South Korea. Protestors burned our photos and tore apart Japanese national flags, staging demonstrations in front of the Japanese embassy almost daily. They were abnormally excited. A senior Japanese police official personally advised me not to go because of danger.

Contradictory reason for refusing entry

On July 28, the LDP secretary general advised us to cancel the visit on the pretense of busy Diet schedules, which indicated there were some South Korea pressure exerted on the LDP.

The LDP did not allow us to apply for a permit from the House of Representatives for an overseas trip during a Diet session. Only Sato got such permit from the House of Councilors.

When Shindo, head of the team, Sato and I arrived at Gimpo International Airport in Seoul on the morning of August 1, we were taken to what looked like a double-door reception room, surrounded by stalwart security guards. Then, the woman chief of the airport's immigration office told us that the office refused our entry into South Korea.

The reason for the refusal was that South Korea's immigration control law allows the office to refuse entry of any person who has valid reasons to be expected to take action harmful to the nation's interests or public safety (Article 3). But the immigration office chief explained that our safety could not be secured and that the tour could affect bilateral relations.

Strangely, the immigration office chief's explanation contradicted the immigration control law provision applied to us. For the reason that we could be exposed to danger, the chief applied the provision against dangerous persons such as terrorists.

Put an end to cosmetic friendship

Japan has a similar immigration control law provision. The Justice Ministry explains that the provision is the very last resort. In Japan, the provision has ever been applied only once.

Why has South Korea dared to apply the provision to us? I suspect that the reason may be that a country whose citizens are refused entry into another country for reasons other than those provided in law is allowed to refuse entry to citizens from the other country for the same reasons. Japan's Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act says, "Even in cases where an alien seeking to land in Japan does not fall under any of the items of the preceding paragraph, if the country of which he or she is a national or citizen denies landing to a Japanese national therein for any reasons other than those set forth in the items of the same paragraph, the Minister of Justice may deny his/her landing for the same reasons." If South Korea refuses our entry for the reason that we are politicians claiming Takeshima as Japanese territory, Japan may refuse entry of South Korea politicians who claim the island is their territory. This may be the reason South Korea has dared to apply the terrorist provision to us.

It is very regrettable that South Korea, which should be a friendly country of Japan, refused our entry. But I would be pleased to make a step forward to promoting real bilateral friendship, rather than cosmetic friendship, by taking advantage of this incident to raise the Takeshima issue for bilateral discussions.

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