Racism in Japan: Exclusion of Korean Schools from the High School Fee Exemption Policy

by Risa Tokunaga

Korean Ethnic Schools in Japan

As of May 2010, there are 73 Korean schools operating in Japan, for which about 8,000 children are attending. The Korean schools follow the Japanese school system which allocates 6 years in the primary education, 3 years in the junior high school, 3 years in high school, and 4 years in tertiary education.

Since their liberation from Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), Korean people in Japan have put a great effort into setting up Korean schools for their children in order to restore Korean language, culture, and history in the face of the Japan's assimilation policy. There have been a number of threats of closure of the Korean schools made by the Japanese government since the Allied Forces occupation period. Even today, the Japanese government does not recognize Korean schools as full status schools, in order to exclude them from public funding and other benefits. Such unjust treatment by the government of Japan has been criticized a number of times at the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and other UN Human Rights Committees.

Exclusion from the High School Fees Exemption Policy

One of the former Hatoyama government’s eye-catching policies was that of “high school fees exemption”. However, only Korean high schools have been excluded from the list of schools which qualify for exemption.

On August 31, 2010, Education Minister Kawabata said that the final decision will be made following discussion by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The final decision is still pending (as of March 3). Discrimination against Korean high schools continues: they have been excluded for several months from the high school fees exemption policy which was introduced in April 2010.

In February 2010 Mr. Hajime Nakai, the Minister in charge of the abduction issue, announced a veto against including Korean schools due to the abduction of Japanese nationals by the
DPRK. On April 30, 2010, the Ministry of Education announced that 31 international schools would be included in the exemption policy. Although Korean schools are considered as educational institutions, the Ministry decided to exclude them from the policy for the time being. The ministry will set up a third party committee which will scrutinize the schools’ curricula and make the decision. The committee opened in May 2010 with six specialist members whose names were withheld.

In August 2010 media reported that the Ministry of Education was finalizing plans to lift the exclusion, stating that Korean schools provide education which is equivalent to that of Japanese high schools and that it should no longer differentiate between them. At the same time, the government said they should make the final decision after cautiously observing the majority view of the DPJ.

The committee of experts published a report on August 29, 2010, which justified special treatment for Korean schools in particular, as all other ethnic schools are “deemed to be equivalent to Japanese high school level by embassies” and international schools are “accredited by an internationally reputable accreditation board”. In the report, it is said that only Korean schools need to be inspected as to whether they meet the criteria for the qualification of teachers and school facilities. The committee stated they do not scrutinize the “actual contents of the curriculum”, but request the submission of the annual balance sheet. If it does not meet the criteria, then the school is excluded from the fee exemption policy.

Even after the report was announced, the ministry of education could not reach a decision because of the DPJ objection. The decision was to be made in September 2010 after a one month delay. This issue has become politicized as reflected by the DPJ discussion, despite the Ministry of Education repeatedly stressing that the exemption policy is connected solely with the educational system, and in no way related to diplomacy or “abduction”.

“Network Against the Exclusion of Korean Schools from the High School Fee Exemption Policy” appealed that the exclusion “is violating the right to equal opportunity in education. If the government excludes only Korean schools, it will constitute official discrimination and violation of human rights”. The network held demonstrations in both March and June 2010 mobilizing 1000 and 1200 people respectively. As of today, 2000 children attend 10 Korean schools nationwide. On 27 August, 2010, a Korean School principal from Tokyo appealed for immediate inclusion in the high school fee exemption policy at the Ministry of Education and said “Our school has even received threatening calls and a razor placed in the back of a school billboard. Each of these
incidents shocked our students. We explained to them that it was only a minority of Japanese people and that many Japanese were supportive of our school. But if the Japanese Government excludes only Korean schools from the fee exemption policy, what should I say to our students?”

As if in response to a move by the government which tried to link Korean Schools and the abduction issue as a justification for the Korean School exclusion, some prefectural governments such as Tokyo and Osaka made a pro-exclusion statement which provoked further discrimination against Korean Schools. On September 7, after a meeting with the network for the family of abductees, Tokyo Governor Ishihara suggested that the Tokyo government should revise the subsidy amount in the scheme for subsidizing foreign schools.

In late November 2010, as a response to the military tension provoked in the Korean Peninsula, the Chief Cabinet Secretary announced the withholding of the application for the fee exemption policy to Korean Schools. AJWRC as well as other Zainichi Korean advocacy groups denounced the government decision which has undermined the basic right to education of Korean children by associating them with the military tension in the Korean Peninsula. The government must guarantee the protection of the rights of Korean children and avoid further discriminatory treatment.

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**FEATURE Feminist Challenge to Continued Colonialism**

Four members of a right wing fascist group Zaitokukai (zainichi tokken wo yurusanai kai) were arrested for forcible obstruction of business in August 2009. The Zaitokukai members attacked a Kyoto Korean Elementary School for its allegedly unlawful occupation of a neighboring park in December 2009. Despite numerous violent acts, it was the first time that Zaitokukai were prosecuted. On the other hand, the Kyoto Prefectural Police sent the former school principal of the Korean School to the Public Prosecutor’s Office on suspicion of violating the city park law.

On December 4, 2009, the Zaitokukai members shouted hate speech through loud speakers in front of the school during the school hours. Some students were terrified by the hate speech and cried out in fear.

The Korean School lodged a criminal complaint against the Zaitokukai for forcible obstruction of business. The Kyoto District Court made a provisional ruling for banning the Zaitokukai demonstration near the Kyoto Korean School but the Zaitokukai continued their activities. In May 2010, the Court ordered an indirect enforcement that the Zaitokukai should pay one million yen per day if it failed to keep the order.

In the civil court case against the members of Zaitokukai, the Kyoto Korean School demanded the court order for banning hate speech within 200 meters of the School as well as damage compensation.

**Source:** The Legal Team for the Kyoto Korean School Case

**Translated by Risa TOKUNAGA**