



A Forum for All Scholars

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1. WWII NOVEL REMOVED

The Chosun Ilbo, March 19, 2007

Korean Americans Win Victory Over WWII Novel

Education authorities in Montgomery County, Maryland will strike from a list of recommended books a novel describing abuses of fleeing Japanese at the hands of Koreans at the end of World War II. The Montgomery County Board of Education informed the Korean Embassy in the U.S. and Korean-American organizations that it has removed "So Far From the Bamboo Grove", an autobiographical novel by Japanese-American Yoko Kawashima Watkins, from the list since it contains inaccurate history and distorted descriptions of Koreans.

Schools in the county will no longer be able to use the novel as a textbook and no more public libraries in the region will purchase the book. The Montgomery Education Board became the first U.S. local education authority to reject the novel, though some U.S. private schools and one public school in New York have voluntarily decided to boycott it.

Many of the 34 middle schools in Montgomery County and nearby Washington D.C., including North Bethesda and Shady Grove, have used the novel as an English textbook for sixth graders. Kwon Tae-myun, the consul general in Washington D.C., hailed the decision as a victory for Korean-American parents and organizations, and predicted it would set a precedent for other local education authorities.

2. CRITIQUE OF THE CRITICISM AGAINST THE BEIJING ACCORD

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Fire against Beijing Accord Have Missed the Mark
February 28, 2007
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On February 13, 2007, members of the six-party talks in Beijing reached agreement on a one-page accord for North Korea to begin the process of dismantling its nuclear weapons program in exchange for economic and energy aid. Conservative critics within the United States immediately attacked the agreement as a sell-out for its resemblance to the failed U.S.-DPRK

Agreed Framework of 1994. Liberal critics accused the Bush administration of having waited too long – long enough to accumulate enough plutonium for several nuclear warheads – before engaging North Korea in negotiations and reaching agreement later than sooner. To be sure, the Beijing accord is far from a perfect solution and rightly deserves critique. However, a closer look reveals the aforementioned criticisms to be based more on politics and political ideologies rather than fair and accurate assessments.

From the right, hardliners argued that the Bush administration should have waited until Pyongyang agreed to fully declare and dismantle its entire nuclear program. In their view, U.S. negotiators wrongly gave in to “an axis of evil” state (paving the way for more such travesties with the likes of Iran) by agreeing to provide too many carrots in return for too little. This argument may not be without some truth. Various reports have suggested that financial sanctions and international pressures on North Korea – particularly from Beijing and Seoul in the aftermath of the July 2006 missiles test and October 2006 nuclear test – were pivotal to bringing North Korea back to the six-party talks in Beijing. Observers around the world had noted that DPRK leaders were becoming more anxious to acquire hard currency and to shift the blame for the impasse on the Bush administration’s “hostile policy” towards North Korea.

To label the recent multilateral agreement as another Agreed Framework, however, would not be just and accurate. Unlike the 1994 agreement, the Beijing agreement concretely outlines only the first steps to be taken during the first 60 days. The much more difficult issues concerning 1) the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, 2) the future of North Korea’s existing plutonium program, and 3) the complete declaration of all North Korean nuclear activities (especially difficult in light of the recent reports casting doubt on North Korea’s covert uranium enrichment) is vague and left for future negotiations. While the new accord with Pyongyang may be wanting to Republicans, the vast amount of real negotiations and its fruition remain unpredictable and may yet prove to be satisfactory.

From the left, praise for the Beijing accord for engaging North Korea and freezing its nuclear program was veiled with assault on the administration for having waited too long. Among others, Democratic Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. of Delaware opined precisely this when he stated, “The bad news is that North Korea’s program is more dangerous to us now than it was in 2002 [when Pyongyang restarted its nuclear program].” The negative remark by Biden, who is officially in the 2008 race for the White House, pertains only to the delay of the resolution that enabled North Korea to process and accumulate the plutonium for nuclear warheads and not the accord itself. The criticism “What took you so long?” is mostly for political points gained at the expense of the Bush administration, not a substantive critique of the accord. And such political calculations are not unexpected of outspoken political

opponents, but liberal critics do not offer real reasons to dislike the Beijing accord.

Most observers may prefer a more long-lasting agreement that guarantees deeper and more concrete disarmament steps in exchange for more diplomatic and economic concessions – greater price (concessions) for greater quality (disarmament). However, in view of Pyongyang's oft-perceived erratic behavior since 2002, to expect such a satisfying deal is to set oneself up for greater disappointment. In fact, pessimistic views that the current agreement will not last past the important 60 days mark is not rare among government officials, academics and media groups.

And unlike with the 1994 agreement, Japan chose not to join the United States, China, South Korea, and Russia in providing energy concessions to North Korea due to the unresolved issue of Japanese abductees. Washington is to later begin the process of removing North Korea from its designation as a terror-sponsoring state, and Tokyo will have a problem with this if its kidnapped citizens are still unaccounted for.

The Beijing accord is not a permanent resolution to the North Korea nuclear issue. The vast bulk of work has been postponed for now, and the end result could range from a satisfactory disarmament to a collapse of the accord. Although history shows that Pyongyang may try to renege on some promises, the multilateral nature of the agreement, which includes the crucial signatures from China and South Korea, adds extra weight to the accord. U.S. lawmakers have thus far failed to take such factors into consideration, and the initial criticisms have missed the mark.

3. JOURNAL: ASIAN WOMEN

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Asian Women is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural journal, which is published in English by the Research Institute of Asian Women at Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul, Korea, with its first edition issued in May, 1995. The journal was published biannually until 2005 and three times in 2006. Starting in 2007, Asian Women will be published quarterly: in March, June, September and December. It has been recognized by Korea Research Foundation (KRF) as a quality international journal and financially supported by the KRF for the last 5 years between 1997 and 2006.

The journal carries articles, viewpoints, book reviews, source materials, and reports on diverse issues such as gender, family, labor, class, power, culture, sexuality, patriarchy, globalization from feminist perspectives. It also serves as a communication channel between researchers in Asia and the rest of the world.

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