GANGJEONG VILLAGE STORY

November 2015

Monthly news on the struggle against the Jeju Naval base project

Published by Gangjeong Village in Jeju, South Korea

The naval base and the future of Gangjeong village

Image by Hosu
Article By Ddalgi

On December 1st an opening ceremony was held on the base for the Jeju Naval Base Squadron. In the near future about 3000 soldiers are expected to be stationed at the base. However, in contrary to their previous claim that they will open the base by the end of 2015 the construction seems quite far from being complete.

On the day before the ceremony the Gangjeong Village Association, Jeju Pan-Island Committee and National Network of Korean Civil Society together conducted a policy debate about the Jeju naval base and peace in Northeast Asia at the Jeju Special Self-Governing Provincial Council Hall. One of the speakers, Cheong Wook Sik commented that the Jeju naval base will create an abstract danger into a definite one by offering practicality to the USA and by posing a threat to China.

After the usual 11 o'clock Catholic mass on December 1st the Gangjeong village committee and activist groups held a press conference to oppose the opening of the Jeju Naval Base Squadron. In their statement they mentioned the militaristic tension in Northeast Asia would be intensified by the naval base and denounced the establishment of the military base on the 10th year anniversary that Jeju was declared "An Island of World Peace."

Immediately after the press conference the navy officers tried to enter through the main gate, which brought much resistance from the villagers and activists. Although the navy must be aware of the catholic mass and the protest ritual that continued for over 4 years, they didn't care to choose a different time of day to march through the gate in their military uniforms. This is why it's hard to find the navy commander, Hyeon Chang-hun's words trustworthy when he stated, "We will try our best to find ways to co-exist and live in harmony between the military and the civilians." His words are contradictory to the navy's ongoing behaviours that began with seizing the villagers' lands and even requested that the village pay over $80,000USD in administrative costs for the evacuation fee from the crackdown on 1st February 2015. More intensified conflicts caused by the presence of the navy in the village are expected: Conflicts between the navy and the villagers; conflicts between the children of the navy and the villagers. The village community will face a crisis when they are far outnumbered by the size of the military that is about to arrive in the village, which has a population of less than 2,000 people. More than ever, support and solidarity are needed in order for the villagers and activists to overcome such hardships at this crucial time in Gangjeong village.

Controversy heats up over second Jeju airport construction project

By Kim Jaehoon

On Nov. 10, the Korean government announced the second international airport project in On-Pyeong Ri, Seong-San district, eastern Jeju, to be completed by 2025. The necessity of additional airport facilities is due to rapid growth in the low-cost carrier market and surge in flight service demand for Chinese tourists. While government offices and interest groups are already welcoming the new airport, local residents appear to have been ignored.

On-Pyeong residents are on the verge of having to forfeit their inherited land due to a unilateral site selection by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport. Nearby villages are also raising their voices against the construction saying they will not be able to live with the noise. Six villages neighbouring the site are forming a countermeasure committee to tackle the government's decision. Resistance from the locals seems inevitable. Jeju citizens seem fatigued from development. As 40 percent of the designated airport site is owned by outlanders, there is a strong impression of speculators' intervention. There is also suspicion over the selection of the area, as it seems like the government is trying to please Korean Airlines (Hanjin Corporation), owner of nearby Jung-Seok Airport. Jeju Islanders are also concerned about the further militarization of the island and worry that the new airport construction could lead to a future air force presence. It was also recently reported that Oreums (volcanic cones) may be levelled in order to build the airport. Needless to say, the construction will cause severe environmental destruction.

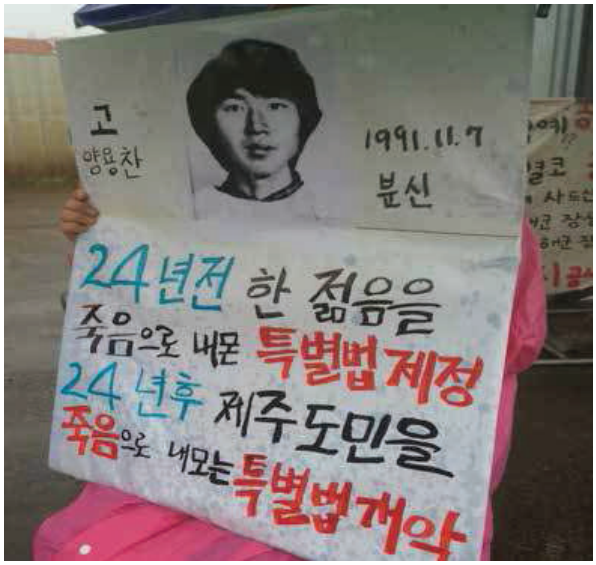

Image by Gangjeong Village Story/ Nov. 7 was remembrance day for Yang Yong-Chan who immolated himself 24 years ago against the creation of the Jeju Special Law which promoted reckless development throughout the Island. In his testimony, he said that he does not want Jeju to be the 2nd Hawaii but a nest for life. Nowadays the politicians attempt to revise the law towards a change for the worse amid people's resistance.

Seeing the future of Gangjeong Village from Pyongtaek's experiences

By Ddalgi

As the opening of the naval base nears, debates and discussions are well underway in the village concerning the question of what kind of changes are imminent and how to deal with the challenge of those changes. Kang Sang-won, the Director of the Pyongtaek Peace Center, visited Gangjeong on November 28th to speak about what lies in store for the village based on the experiences of those in Pyongtaek who fought against the expansion of U.S. military bases there.

While changes in the village may not be immediately apparent, he spoke of the importance of remaining vigilant about the seeping influence of military culture. In particular, he advised to pay attention to the effects on children. In the case of the Navy Marine units that train for 200 days at sea, there are only a few days per month when they have time to come out into the private sector and interact socially.

This resulted in many conflicts within the naval families, and such problems were projected onto their children. In a village of Wonjeong-ri when Pyongtaek 2 fleet were stationed there, elementary school students began showing symptoms of anxiety and violent tendencies, as it was apparent how the influence of family feuds had spilled over to the children. He said many in the Navy recognized how training patterns significantly affecting their own culture, saying 'Think of captured hyenas who are suddenly released." After the Navy is deployed in Gangjeong, their children will attend nearby schools, including Gangjong Elementary School. At this time, in addition to the pro-/anti-base conflict within the town, Navy, there are various ways the conflicts with the naval soldiers will have an influence on children. In addition, another kind of damage that will result from the creation of a naval base is psychological, particularly the extreme sense of having one's property invaded at the same time that there is an influx of military culture, given that there will be prohibited areas surrounding military facilities and restrictions on the expansion or height of civilian buildings in nearby areas.

This will bring about a serious crisis in the community since the beginning measures are required to preserve the village's culture and to to actively protect the village community against the Navy's [influx]. Just as Daechu-ri in Pyeongtaek posted a sign at its village entrance saying 'U.S. off-limits,' Gangjeong village must urgently take forceful measures from the beginning to deal with the incoming naval base that could otherwise destroy the village.

Confronting the Provincial Governor

By Sunny

On November 23rd, Jeju Weekly, an English newspaper agency on the island, held a forum in Jeju City. The forum was titled, "How to make Jeju an Island of Culture" and involved four foreign (western) artists and photographers who delivered 5 minute presentations on the topic, along with the provincial governor Won Hee Ryong and his staff from the Ministry of Culture. Several cameramen from prominent TV news agencies were also present at the conference to ensure they were able to take good shots of the many foreign members of the audience. However, the contents underneath the image were incredibly rude and gave the impression that Jeju lacks any culture and needed western artists contribution. Even though they only proposed things like modern representations of Jeju stone statues and "Jeju Gods exhibition featuring European print techniques." I participated in this event and prepared a speech to unsettle the forum in front of the governor and western artists. I waited for the Q and A session, but before it began, the governor suddenly told the audience that he had to leave and could only stay for one question. I was taken aback, but I quickly gathered myself in order to be the first questioner. However, I was shocked to realize that the questions were already chosen and were shown on the projector with English translations. The shock slowly evolved into anger as stupid inquiries began to fill up the time, like on visa policies. Eventually, the fourth question was raised and I immediately erupted. I shouted as loudly as I could: "Excuse me!! Does the audience get to ask questions too??" This startled the moderator who responded by saying that the audience can have 5 minutes to ask questions IF they are interested. With this, I took the opportunity to take the microphone. I took out my speech and started reading with a booming voice. Three minutes passed as I criticized everything that I could, from the naval base construction and the foreign artists' destruction of Jeju local culture. Unfortunately, the governor left with his cameramen, but at least one minister from the Ministry of Culture was there listening, along with the audience of whom the majority felt obviously uncomfortable about the speech, but others gave me thumbs up sign with a soft "good job" under their breath, to signify a job well done.

The myth of stopping War with more Wars

By Lina

The construction of the naval base in Gangjeong is nearly complete. The site will house navy submarines, weaponries and machines that would be used for war. A site to train and house young men and women who are trained to kill in the name of national security. During my stay in Korea I was often confused when older generation Koreans would claim that young people in Korea did not experience the war, that younger generations do not understand what it feels like to live through war. Therefore, many of the older people I met in Korea claim that because they suffered from war, we need to have a stronger army, we need to increase spending on national security, we need to train more soldiers to avoid war. But how can we avoid war by being more violent, by making more weapons, by building more bases? Do we avoid war by making and preparing for more wars? It is particularly important for communities who disagree with the claim that violence can be stopped with more violence to speak up and to engage in the political discussion. Such strategic military techniques are being proven time after time that they are only creating more devastation and more destruction. We only have to study history and look around our world today to see how armed violence only creates more violence, pain and destruction. The struggle in Gangjeong is not only important to the locals, or only to the larger Korean population, the importance of the struggle in Gangjeong lies in the fact that the movement provides many communities around the world the space and the tools to imagine an alternative to state violence and wars.

Image by Sunny/ On Nov. 11, Dr. Jude Fernando from Trinity College, Dublin met villagers and activists, and shared the recent history of Sri Lankan civil war and the massacre of Tamil ethnic group.

International Solidarity

Image by the Gangjeong Village Story/ On Oct. 31, Professors Suh Sung and Gavin McCormack visited the village. Prof. Suh is a former South Korean political prisoner and Prof. McCormack is a co- writer of the book 'Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States,' co-authored with Satoko Oka Norimatsu. The two visited the Jeju upon the 5th Jeju 4·3 Peace Forum in the Jeju city, hosted by the Jeju 4·3 Peace Foundation.

Questions about Port Entry and Completion Rate

By Park Inchun

On Nov. 16th, the ROKS Dokdo (LPH 6111) entered the port of the naval base construction site in Gangjeong under the pretext of an entry test. During my site observation there were no media reporters, but conservative South Korean media outlets later reported that the ROKS Dokdo had made a smooth entry into the port. It appears they were merely repeating the Navy's words. The problem of the ROKS Dokdo started with its berthing and troops disembarking from the ship. The automatic stairs of the ROKS Dokdo were too short to reach the dock even though the dock was specifically designed to accommodate the ROKS Dokdo. The troops could not disembark from the ship and so it was pulled by tugboats. Even though its short gate was eventually fastened to the docking facility with ropes, it was soon lifted and the ship departed. Additionally, a convoy passed through the UNESCO biodiversity conservation area near Tiger Island when it entered the port on Nov. 24. The Navy knew about problems in the base design and therefore changed its veering angle. In reality, it is impossible for military ships to avoid passing through this area. Another example of conservative media distortion is construction completion rate. According to some media sources there are places where construction is almost complete. For example, in the first work area (the southwest breakwater construction area) managed by Samsung, only one third of the cement had been laid, but some media reported that its construction was 97% complete this October. This constitutes the spreading of false information. People should know that this is being done in order for the Navy to hurry through a completion ceremony.

**Beginning with an Aegis destroyer on September 16, the navy has entered military ships into the port under the pretext of tests even before the completion of the base's construction. As the writer has pointed out, it is questionable whether the ships succeeded in making a proper entry test. It has been pointed out that the base layout was flawed from the beginning. There is another problem with the current entry of military ships into Gangjeong Port. Even though it is so called a civilian-military port, it is the military that would totally control ships' navigations.*

Image by Bokhee/ Gangjeong peace activist,Bokhee, is doing one person picketing right in front of the police station that has illegally arrested and charged Park Sung-Soo (Dungree), an ex-Gangjoeng peacekeeper, for defaming the current president, Park Geun-hye's reputation. Dungree has been detained since this April and was expected to be released after 6 months. However, on Oct. 27, the Daeku local court re-detained him absurdly charging him of violating the protest and demonstration law.

Trial Updates

› On Nov. 4, female villager Kim Miryang was arrested at Gimpo Airport, Seoul and detained in a detention centre in Seoul. She was visiting Seoul for regular outpatient treatment. Concerned about her health, her friends donated around 6,000 USD to cover fines she had incurred, mostly under the charge of obstruction of business. These fines come out of her peaceful protest in opposition to the base construction in 2013 when the Navy pushed through construction in violation of the National Assembly's conditions. After a two-year trial, the court imposed these fines on Kim who was subsequently placed on a wanted list after claiming that she did not want to pay unjust fines.

› On Nov. 20, the Supreme Court dismissed an appeal by peace activist Mr. Park Jong-Hoon and maintained the court's original decision of a one-year suspended sentence with two years' probation and 120 hours of social service work for charges including obstruction of business.

› On Nov. 25, the local Jeju court handed down a suspended one-year sentence with two years' probation to village mayor Cho Kyung-Chul for the charge of special obstruction of justice. This resulted from the Jan. 31 sit-in tent protest when the Ministry of National Defense conducted a crackdown on protesters resisting the construction of military residential buildings during which Cho was arrested. On the day protesters built an 8-meter high watchtower which Cho and other determined people climbed up while others chained their bodies around the sit-in tent. The police originally filed an arrest warrant against him, but the court dismissed this in early February. However, the prosecutors indicted him in June as a main leader of the protest.

Is the military helping to write history textbooks?

On Nov. 5 Minister of National Defence Han Min-Koo stated in the National Assembly that, "the military is cooperating so that it can help write state-issued history textbooks." His statement was given in response to a question by ruling conservative Saenuri Party, Han Ki-Ho who asked about the Ministry of National Defence's plan in relation to the state-issued history textbook project. It was only the following day that the chief of the committee compiling the history textbooks who manages the writing of history books for the middle and high school students remarked that he would be willing to have military experts contribute to the writing process alongside political, economy, and constitutional scholars, especially on the subject of the Korean War.

It was in the 1970s under the military dictatorship of the current president's father, Park Chung-Hee, that the writing of history textbooks was placed under the control of the state. However, this system had collapsed by 2011 thanks to the democracy movement in Korea. It is truly regressive that the current Park administration is pushing for state issued history textbooks. Furthermore, it is simply unimaginable to have the military help author teenagers' textbooks.

In relation to Jeju, the truth of April 3 could be greatly distorted in the history textbooks if the military is involved in the writing process. What about Gangjeong? History could be militarized in order to justify the construction of war bases and to glorify war culture. That is why we should keep a close watch over this dangerous move.

Image by Kim Keun Bong/ On Nov. 13th, Bang Jong-Woon, leader of the Colt/Coltec workers' struggle hit his 40th day hunger strike in Seoul which started upon the absurd remark by a conservative ruling party representative who distorted the fact about the union. On the day, many Gangjeong people including Yang Yoon-Mo who has carried out three times long-term hunger strike against base in the past visited him. Bang has visited the village many times and been arrested for his solidarity protest for Gangjeong.

"Look over the Sea"

By Choi Sungku

"My Dear, you must be so proud of your parents who are struggling to save your village
And a day must come where we will all remember the beauty of this long struggle."

This is a poem that was sent to the children at Gangjeong elementary school by poet Shin Kyung-Rim. We have now passed 3000 days of the struggle and soon we will see the completion of the base. Now in the Seogwipo Art Center, there is photography exhibition named "Jeok, look over the sea" that is running from 24 November to 2 December. 'Jeok' has two meanings, it is a state of behaviour and also is when time indicates that behavioural state.

Many photos in the exhibition are displaying the landscapes around the village, which have since dramatically changed since construction began. The exhibition shows the faces of villagers, the day that the Gureombi rock was destroyed, the peace activist who were trapped by the police and the wire fence and the changes of the beautiful soft coral habitats off the Gangjeong coast that will never be the same. The exhibition is a record of our struggle and a testimony to how the village changed since the navy base construction began.

Catholic priest Fr. Mun Jeong-Hyeon stated that "Photos never lie, never hide the truth. The truth is always revealed through art", he went on to explain how he feels, "I look at those photos one by one and I can't stop the tears from falling." We discussed the memories that arose from the pictures and smiled to each other, while others with us just continued to stare at those pictures for a long time with tears in their eyes.

The exhibition will also be on display in a gallery in Seoul from 9 to 12 December.

Image by Licky Rooney/ The village sport festival was held on November 8 at the community field. Villagers and activists mingled while participating in different games like race, a jumping rope, a tug-of-war, soccer and so on.

How You Can Help

1. Write a letter to the South Korean government to stop the Jeju base project and to the US government to stop the support for it.
2. Write letters to Gangjeong's prisoners of conscience.
3. Stay updated by joining our Facebook groups and following us on twitter.
4. Organize a solidarity event (concert, movie screening, protest, etc...)
5. Then share about it on social media.
6. Visit Gangjeong!
7. For other ways to help and more visit us on the web.

For More Information

http://www.SaveJejuNow.org
http://www.facebook.com/groups/NoNavalBase
http://www.facebook.com/SaveJeju
http://www.twitter.com/SaveJejuNow

For Gangjeong related videos, visit savejejunow.org or check these Vimeo/Youtube users :

Vimeo : cho sung bong / DH Song / Regis Tremblay
Youtube : Gang-Jeong Il-Gi / Shalomsea / 1234yz100 / Sungbong2012

— Created and designed by the Gangjeong International Team, special thanks to Everyday Practice.
— Published by the Gangjeong Village Association, 4417 Gangjeong-dong, the Life and Peace village, Seogwipo-si, Jeju, the Peace Island. Email: gjengnews@gmail.com
— Special thanks to Gangjeong Friends for financial support.

Peace as the "First-Strike"

By Buddy

In the Fall of 2015, I traveled to Okinawa for the first time and to Jeju Island for my second visit. On my return to Chicago, I spent a sleepless jetlag night listening to one of the Democratic debates. In it, I heard Governor Webb rattling sabers time and time again over the specious "threat" of China. Nobody else on the presidential line-up challenged his remarks.

The uptick in rhetoric coming out of Washington has been frightening, and these toxic fumes yielded nothing but an increased military budget in Beijing. It's so important to support struggles against U.S. bases in Asia!

Jeju activists and Okinawa activists understand the safest way to achieve peace is to extend a hand of friendship first: that is, to demonstrate peace as a "first-strike." The U.S.-Japan-Korea trifecta must operate in good faith if they expect the same treatment from anyone else.

I am sick today, remembering that huge battleships and thousands of Korean soldiers will soon descend on Gangjeong. The cycle of distrust has brought a situation where all the money is going to the weapons companies instead of to the children's future. We must refuse to allow it any longer.

Image by the Gangjeong Village Story/ On Nov. 14th when there was a people's general rally against the current Park Geun-Hye Government, around 100,000 people gathered in the center of Seoul. Gangjeong also joined the protest with its flag. On the day, the Government shot down water cannon directly toward people to the violation of law. As a result, Mr. Baek Nam-ki, a former vice –President of Korean Peasants League in his 70s fell down and has not recovered his consciousness yet.

We send our message of sorrow, solidarity, and condolences to victims of violence around the world, including France, Lebanon, Mali, and Nigeria.