# *2022 RAS Korea Essay Contest*

Once again, RAS Korea is grateful for the many Korean high school students who submitted essays for the third annual event. We are grateful for the contest sponsors: Korea Heritage Education Institute (K\_Heritage\_Lab), which contributes the prize money, and RAS Korea’s sponsor, Asia Development Foundation, which provides essential administrative support.

In a change from previous contests, we switched from an open topic format to a narrower field of consideration. Three topics were offered from which the essayists could choose. These included, “How can Korea preserve its cultural assets for future generations? How should Korea make choices about what is culturally relevant and vital?”; “What is something that is not currently being taught in your school that you think could foster a better understanding or appreciation of Korea’s history or culture? How would this improved awareness help us today?”; “You have been asked to make a new holiday in Korea. When is your new holiday, what is it about, and how is it celebrated?”

We had many creative essays submitted for consideration. The judges had to assess writing quality, choice of topic, and how the writers developed their theses and supporting arguments. The Grand Award essay is printed on the next page with minimal editing for readers to appreciate the essayist’s intense and passionate voice.

Grand Award: “Vietnam War: Our dark side of the moon” by Kim Jiyoon, Myungduk Foreign Language High School

Runner-up: “When eggplant flowers bloom” by Oh Sumin, Myungduk Foreign Language High School

Commendation: “Let’s add making Kimchi to the school curriculum” by Hong Suemin, Myungduk Foreign Language High School

We were deeply impressed by the response to the contest. We applaud all the writers who participated. They showed a talent for communicating their ideas and feelings. We look forward to next year’s contest with keen expectations.

2022 Judges Panel

# *Vietnam War: Our Dark Side of the Moon*

Kim Jiyoon

Shin Chae-Ho, a prominent historian during the Japanese colonial era, said ‘A nation that forgets its past has no future.’ is commonly used by Korean people when they discuss about historical issues, such as Comfort Women (Japanese military sexual slavery). In history class, Korean students learn that the perpetrator countries should admit their historical crimes and remember their tragic moments of Korean history. However, regardless how tragic Korean history was, the Korean history curriculum should add an extra section teaching Vietnam war crimes as the same as the one about comfort women. If education is the tool of appreciating history, learners should be able to learn and appreciate every single part, not just fragments of it.

The most basic reason is, of course, because Korean students don’t know about the Vietnam war. During 1964 to 1973, the Korean government dispatched troops to Vietnam for America. Korean soldiers committed over 80 accounts of massacres. According to The Diplomat, there are no accurate records about the massacres, but the number is roughly measured to be as high as 9,000 people killed. There were hundreds or even thousands of rape cases. However, there are not many students who know about this. According to the result of an informal survey among 47 Korean high school students in Seoul, over 40 percent of students have never heard of Vietnam war crimes, contrast to the fact that every single student was aware of Comfort Women. On the other hand, the victims already had tremendous miseries, they even have to testify about their unsavory affair. Only the victims are going through affliction while the criminal doesn’t even know the crime’s existence.

The more the situation is discussed, the more horrible it turns out to be. South Korea’s abuse toward Vietnam is not just a past tense. According to the Korean Ministry of Justice, there are about 138,000 married immigrant women, and 32.9% of them are from Vietnam. Due to Korea’s racism, patriarchy, and contempt toward poor Korean skills, Vietnamese married immigrant women’s human rights are falling. According to Joongang, 42.1 percent of married immigrant women from

Vietnam are in abusive marriages. To stop the hatred, history about the similar loath must be known to the Korean public. Nothing different from the raping’s case, reincarnation of violence is another form of infliction toward Vietnam.

Moreover, the voice of justice is not only good for the orator himself. Some Koreans, regardless of the facts, criticize the voice of people who dare tell the accurate history. They say it is insane to shame war participants, who are still suffering with the aftereffects of defoliant. What they are suffering cannot be their indulgence. Korean society thinks the victim will always stay as a victim, which is totally an error of the black and white logic. Are there any differences with Japan and South Korean governments that keep hiding and denying their past? ‘Everyone can be a perpetrator’ is a simple notion that is written in middle school’s ethics textbook. This is not simply the problem of ethics. What can the Korean government say if Japan claims why they need to apologize about their crimes if the Korean government also denies with the same excuse of not having incriminating evidence? Following the echo of truth is ultimately connected with Korea’s own struggle. The voice of justice is never only good for itself.

Lai Dai-hans are another problem that came from Vietnam war crimes, and it’s also the reason why we need to improve the awareness on. Lai Dai-hans are children born between Vietnam women and South Korean soldiers. They are called the Enemy’s Child and are often bullied or abused because of their blood. Furthermore, since South Korean soldiers returned to Korea alone, leaving their victims in poverty behind, most Lai Dai Hans’ families cannot afford their children’s education. As a result, they cannot escape the vicious cycle of poverty. Some people might refute that teaching about the Vietnam war will not give practical help to Lai Dai Hans. However, some Lai Dai Hans are starting to come to South Korea to either find their family, get a job, or both. How should Korean students see and treat Lai Dai Hans when they become a member of the society if they don’t even know them? Without proper education, Koreans will have a hard time finding the best way to live in harmony. Some might harass the Lai Dai Hans since they might think they are in a poor condition. The Korean Government should not look on with folded arms at their kin of not being welcomed in either place. If not, Korea’s ethic nationalism is rather nothing more than racism, since Lai Dai Hans are the same Koreans, only half-blooded.

The fact that history is a collection of shame is not something to be ashamed of. History which excludes every dark time and only collects triumph is nothing more than a meaningless trophy. To Korea, confessing

our war crimes is not only our duty but a key solution for both our internal and external issues. The Vietnam war is our dark side of the moon. Even though people on Earth can’t see the dark side of the moon, it can be seen outside Earth. If Korea keeps ignoring their war crimes, Korean people might forget their existence, but the world never forgets nor ignores it. Therefore, education about Vietnam war crimes is essential.

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