The Shifting Laws of Causality

Proposing one major event that merged the April 3rd incident with Sewol tragedy or the Gangjeong issue might have generated public reflection on Jeju’s current and past history. But the April 3rd commemoration event also lumped together the buoyant shamanistic ritual of the so-called “Gut”, producing one confusing emotional mess in the city hall of Jeju-si. This meant merry rock bands and random street performances instead of solemn public discussions for addressing the source of victims’ pains and how to treat them.

The lack of serious and individual reflection, I think, naturally resulted out of the lack of properly understanding the roots of these issues. Bishop Kang U-Il’s recent address in an editorial on the anniversary of Sewol’s submersion highlighted this problem. Bishop Kang sharply criticized the prosecutors’ reasoning behind sinking of the ship. The prosecutors focused on the sudden changing of the ship’s direction as the main cause of the accident (the turn shifting the cargo in the ship and knocking the vessel off balance). However, Bishop Kang notes that this was the result, not the root of the incident. In other words, the prosecutors have failed to address what caused the ship to suddenly turn in the first place.

Bishop Kang suggests that the misrecognition of causes from the consequences has effect of avoiding the core of the problem. Doing so leaves victims not only enraged, but also unable to find the answers they need to move on from their tragedy: The April 3rd incident and the Gangjeong issue are also confronted by similar concerns. Governor Won’s public address for the 67th April 3rd Anniversary centered on heading toward the future as the solution for overcoming the pain and the injustices of the affair. But no words were said on looking at the past or the present to tackle the true sources of these pains and injustices: a basic requirement for their actual overcoming.

The Gangjeong naval base project is no less different; the Korean government has proffered many reasons for the construction, from attracting tourism and investments to boosting security measures to thwart the “North Korean threat”. But many protestors in Jeju and abroad are clearly aware that the true motive pertains to US’ attempts to contain the military expansion of China in the region under the “Asia Pivot” plan. Everything else, like tourism and investments, can be possible outcomes of the construction. But they are not the origin.

The “confusing emotional mess” of an event held in Jeju-si shows us what the switching of the causes and consequences can lead to. It does not allow victims to genuinely deal with the sources of their past wounds. The unresolved tensions then drag on to the present, mixing with later devastating events that also do not receive approriate resolution. The process mirrors a snowball effect; all heartbreaking memories from the past become packed into one undistinguishable heap of emotions that is ever-growing and festering in the present. That is what our future will also look like, not the one envisioned by the governor, and no amount of loud rock music and street performances could conceal the reality.

Solidarity with the Sewol struggle

While Sewol ferry disaster struggle has just reached its one-year anniversary on April 16th, lots of solidarity actions were taken in Gangjeong. Gangjeong Village Association sent its video and photo solidarity message; Gangjeong ocean team made a sea performance to re-float a banner written that “Re-float the sewol ferry and uncover the truth”; the fund-raising actions for sewol struggle were taken including a flea market, and contributing our one-day laboring to collect young bracken (a popular vegetable growing in spring) in the grass field to sell.

On the night of April 16th, Gangjeong village bus brought villagers to Seogwipo city participating in the Sewol Ferry candle light vigil. “Gangjeong Chorus” sang a song—“Oh, friend” in the candle light vigil to remember the sewol victims.

Without planning a special event, a continuous, silent but powerful lantern for sewol victims has been lightened in the Mass tent in front of the Gangjeong naval base. Everyday, people draw a different victim’s face and leave a different message on the lantern. It has lightened and warmed passengers heart here.

Do you know what makes Gangjeong so precious? It is the heart to feel others’ suffering.
Interview with Uncle Oh Do-heung

Uncle Oh Do-heung is the director of Tongmul library, which is a part of the Peace movement for the children of Gangjeong village. Many residents are tired of the long struggle against the naval base construction, but Uncle Oh Do-heung continues to increase his participation within the Gangjeong community.

Q: What made you activate join in the village struggle?
A: I am the fifteenth in my line of ancestors to live on Jeju Island. I returned 5 years after a 10 year absence and my hometown seemed like a different place, many people I didn’t know and the atmosphere had changed. The relationship among villagers, once harmonious had become estranged. I wanted to work to return the community to the way of life I knew it could achieve.

Q: How did you become a part of Book Village Project Team?
A: While taking a walk, I saw the construction going on at the Tongmool library and one of the staff explained the project to me. I discussed with him wanting to be involved and that’s how I joined.

Q: What has changed in regard to the participation of Gangjeong villagers in the struggle?
A: The participation of villagers has continued to reduce over the past year. Ideally it would have been better for the children of Gangjeong to have a library. However, for the children of Gangjeong, who are willing to take great risks to stand up to their government and act for peace, human rights, and the rights of all beings.

Jeju Island is standing at the crossroads. Is it going to be the island of environmental destruction and military bases which will only lead to death? Or is the island of life and peace where endangered species like Jeju dolphins live freely? At every point of time, we are forced to make a choice. Apparently, we all seem to know the answer. But to many of the people, the choice is not that easy to make because it is not presented in the simple form. The capitalists are experts in sugarcoeing where they make people believe military base means economic prosperity and environmental destruction means more money. And this is where documentary films can fill in. Movies can make you see through twisted information and focus on the real important issue. At least, this is what audience has confessed to me after they watched Jeju’s Aching Heart, the Irish made documentary on the struggle. They said they thought Gangjeong was over now that the base construction is irreversible. In the several film screenings in Jeju and Seoul, the viewers were ready to pay attention to the suffering of the islanders. During the film they cried together with Vice Mayor Koh. And when the show was over they once again felt deep compassion for the aching villagers who vow to continue to live their hard-knock lives on Jeju. Life will go on here and Jeju people will say no to death. If you think Gangjeong has lost the battle, please watch this film which is an ouverture to a 21st century version of the imperialist conflicts. When the construction is done, nuclear warships will show up in the sea. And then military tension will dictate the treacherous region. What path should we take?

International Solidarity

The village welcomes the release of Kathy Kelly. On April 21(U.S. time), Kathy Kelly who has visited Gangjeong before was released after three months in a prison in the US for her drone protest in front of an air force base in the state of Missouri.

Image: by the Gangjeong Village Story
Dream of resurrection

On 2nd April 2015, during the Easter week, the brutal conduct of the Republic of Korea government provoked the Sewol family members to shave their heads. Feeling the pain of the Sewol Ferry tragedy, along with political instability in the air and pressure on my heart, I decided to maintain a vigil of prayer for resurrection over the Holy three days of Easter.

The Catholic Group in Gangjeong had planned a ritual washing of the feet to take place at the time of the Lord’s Last Supper near the Gangjeong stream at 5pm. However due to poor weather the ceremony was held in the mass tent. In spite of the rain and his poor mobility Father Lim Han-Wook travelled from the mainland to participate in the ceremony, washing the feet of the people sitting around the altar. I was touched by this scene and felt as if my own feet were washed.

On Good Friday, the march of the Cross (Via Crucis) began in front of a daily mass tent at 3pm, passing through the Samgeori restaurant where Gangjeong activists eat and rest, through to Gangjeong port where many SOS (Save Our Seas) members have been arrested, past the military residence construction site, the epicenter of the tower struggle and finally arriving at the Gangjeong Life and Peace Pastoral Center being built. There we stopped and sang in chorus.

Generally the Easter vigil mass would be held with the grandeur and splendor as the most important liturgy of the year, but in Gangjeong the mass was held with reused candles and without burning any incense. We met the timing of great Resurrection of Jesus in humble forms in Gangjeong.

Free Dungree Free Democracy

On the 28th April Park Sung-Soo, who is known in Gangjeong as Dungree, was arrested while he and his 10 colleagues were holding a press conference outside the Supreme Prosecutor’s Office in Seoul to denounce President Park Geun Hye’s Government oppression on freedom of speech. The prosecutors, whom Park Sung-Soo criticized for their dog-like blind loyalty to the President, regarded him to have violated the law on assembly when he and press conference participants made a dog like barking sound three times as a protest to the prosecutors’ warning. Park has previously sent dog food to regional police stations in protest to the Government’s oppression on people through the mobilization of prosecutors and the police. The Court issued an arrest of warrant against him on May 1 for the charge of damage to the President’s honor. Park Sung-Soo has videos recorded the daily Gangjeong protests for the last two years and has previously volunteered to be imprisoned instead of paying fines for protesting in 2013. After leaving Gangjeong he has continued his own work for democracy and the environmental movement through the publication of his own book.

Gangjeong Fundraiser or a Fun-raiser?

On April 29th, hundreds of people gathered in Jeju-si to partake in a fundraising event to alleviate the prodigious and unjust fines imposed on the Gangjeong people. The event started from 12 pm and continued until 10 pm.

The long hours were marked by merry consumptions of nonstop food and wine, along with boisterous laughter filling the massive hall crowded by villagers, lawyers, activists, and artists.

Quite a scene it was to gaze upon such diverse groups of people all brought together with the motive of lessening the financial burdens. But one could almost forget this part with the roars of laughter and kids enjoying the plentiful food. It seemed more like people were there to just have a wonderful time.

Thinking about peace and justice

Jeongbang Waterfall is a famous tourist point on Jeju Island, known for the water directly falling to the ocean. But not many know this was the one of the major April 3 massacre sites in the southern part of the island. Hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians were shot or bamboo-speared to death and then tossed off the 23 m (75 ft) cliff down to the ocean.

The annual shamanistic ritual, Haewon-Sangsaeng Gut was held April 11 at the waterfall this year to honor the victims and remember the state violence. On the sunny morning, the historical and tourist attraction was filled with people, busy taking photos. But then a ritual presenter announced that if the Sewol ferry carrying 476 people, mostly high school students on a field trip, hadn’t capsized about a year ago or the government had done the right job rescuing the passengers, then the young minds too could have appreciated this beauty of the grandeur and splendor as the most important liturgy of the year, but in Gangjeong the mass was held with reused candles and without burning any incense. We met the timing of great Resurrection of Jesus in humble forms in Gangjeong.
"A Call for an End to the Korean War and the Elimination of Nuclear Threats on the Korean Peninsula"

A joint petition to be declared on May 4 by People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) and Solidarity for Peace and Reunification of Korea (SMRK)

(Excerpts from the long proposal)

First: Immediately reconvene the lapsed Six-Party Talks in order to find ways to establish a nuclear-free zone on the Korean peninsula to resolve the nuclear crisis.

Second: Parallel to, or preceding, the Six-Party Talks, the countries involved -- including South Korea, North Korea, the US, and China -- should conduct negotiations that would lead to ending the armistice system and replacing it with a permanent peace system, based on the conclusion of a peace treaty.

Third: Parallel to, or preceding, the Six-Party Talks, North Korea-US, and North Korea-Japan bilateral talks should be initiated in order to comprehensively improve relations between these states.

Fourth: The two Koreas should expand their dialogue and cooperation with each other, with the active support and encouragement of neighboring countries.

Fifth: There must be an end to the US-Japan-ROK military cooperation, including the missile defense system, which perpetuates the arms race on the peninsula and in the wider East Asian region.

Sixth: Japan must be prevented from exercising the right of collective self-defense, as interpreted by the Abe administration, because this would nullify the Japanese peace constitution, particularly article 9, which has served as an anchor of peace in East Asia.

Seventh: With the conclusion of the Korean peninsula peace treaty, hostile military alliances must be phased out, stage by stage, and replaced by peaceful reciprocal relations, in order to contribute to the common security of the Korean peninsula and all East Asian countries.

Sail on the Sea of Peace!
Inter-island Solidarity for Peace

Military bases are like monsters, which survive by sucking the blood of people. US military bases in Okinawa have shed the blood of Vietnamese people and another base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean has sacrificed people’s lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. New military bases occupy land expelling the people who have lived for a long time in that place. And the bases are surrounded by “red-light districts.” It’s so sorry that the beautiful and holy rock “Gureombi” is now paved over by cement and concrete and will be surrounded by prostitutes. Soldiers are the killing tentacles of these monsters.

They are wild animals without reason and machines without spirit. Otherwise they couldn’t kill human beings, who have the image of God, as if they were pigs or cows. This monster in Gangjeong tried first to set up at Hwasoon in west Jeju but after it was kicked out of Hwasoon, it came to Wimi near Seogwipo City. But after it was expelled again from there, finally it came to Gangjeong. If it had been rejected by Gangjeong village, it would found another victim in another place. This is why we have to make a peace zone in which no more monsters can survive.

We campaign to make Jeju a demilitarized peace island. And we try to encourage Okinawa people to expel all of the US military bases and demilitarize their islands. Even though Taiwan people have a more complicated identity, we try to persuade them also to join as a point of the triangle of the demilitarized peace sea in East Asia.

Let’s sail on the sea of peace and coexistence!

Let’s open new era of peace and living together, closing the old era of confrontation and hatred! Let’s erase the East China Sea from the map and draw a new name for the blue ocean which embraces Jeju, Okinawa and Taiwan: the Sea of Peace and Coexistence! I will call youth from Korea, Japan, China and islands surrounding this ocean to sail together to proclaim peace and life on the sea.

We will visit every border island fighting against the building of military bases and encourage them to rise up and to be aware that we who are the villagers of the islands are the real owners and stewards for keeping the peace of our sea. Let’s sail together on the sea of peace! Let’s be born again as new creatures filled with the spirit of peace and freedom by sailing on the blue ocean of dolphins and dugongs!