The Struggle for Life and National Liberation of Koreans in Japan in the 1920s: *Centered on the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to revisit the organizational processes and activities of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan (hereafter referred to as the General Union), which was formed vis-à-vis the unification of the various labor organizations by Koreans in Japan throughout different regions, to examine the lives of Korean residents in Japan and the struggle for national liberation after 1922. It is imperative that light be shone upon the interrelationship between the Korean-Japanese intellectuals and "the people" who faced ethnic and class contradictions within the structure of Japanese colonial governance. This means analyzing the tensions and anxieties borne of how the movements unfolded amid conflicts surrounding the discourses toward national liberation and contradictions inherent in the lower ranks. Only through such an analysis can movement history be reconstructed into that which reflects the demands forwarded by "the people." The articles examines the organization and activities of the General Union, which played a significant part in the Korean national liberation movements in Japan and fought to defend the lives of Korean residents in Japan. The General Union was a federation of Korean labor unions established in various regions of Japan. As such, simply analyzing the processes of the organization and activities of the General Union does not diverge in any meaningful way from the framework innate in previous studies; in fact, what must be clarified is the Union's relationship with the struggles of local unions or workers.

Keywords: General Union of Korean Workers in Japan, March First Movement, national liberation movement, Korea, Japan, labor organization

Prologue

The year 2019 marked the centennial of the March First Independence Movement of Korea. The movement was not only developed throughout the Korean Peninsula, where more than two million people staged and participated in independence demonstrations from March to May 1919, but also interlinked with the movements of Koreans overseas, including students. The March First Independence Movement also influenced the Chinese revolutionary movements as well as the movements in the Russian Far East. Therefore, the March First Independence Movement should be regarded as a world-historical movement, not just as a movement bound by a specific locus, a perspective that is not debatable.

In the case of Korean students in Japan, they proclaimed the "February 8 Declaration of Independence" and vowed to confront the oppression and control of Korea by Japanese imperialism (hereafter referred to simply as Japan). The Declaration is understood to have become the "ignition" of the March First Independence Movement.[1] In addition, from 1920 to 1935, a national struggle to commemorate the March First Independence Movement took place despite the changes in organizations and participants.[2]

However, the March First anniversary struggle of 1922 cannot be confirmed. According to Pae Yŏng-mi (2017), the main reason is that a petition campaign was launched to register Korean independence as an issue on the agenda during the Washington Conference (November 12, 1921 to February 6, 1922). Although the petition movement ultimately failed, about half of the entire Korean residents in Tokyo participated, and, more significantly, it was the first case in which Korean students and the workers acted together. Around the time of the Washington Conference, the following events took place: there was the murder of Min Wŏn-sik by the student Ryang Kŭn-hwan in February 1921, the trial for which 1,500 Koreans attended; then in 1922, there were a fact-finding mission and speeches for the massacre of Korean workers at Nakatsugawa in Niitgata Prefecture and the massacre of Koreans at the construction site of a hydroelectric

[1] For example, see T. Kang 1979, 39–46; Hiroto 1980, 19–32; 1981, 61–72.

[2] After 1935, the March First Independence Movement's anniversary struggle was confirmed in 1946 (see K. Kim 2009, 55–72).

power plant.[3] These two tragedies can be said to have been the opportunity for the Korean movements in Japan to shift from a student-centered movement to one that encompassed workers as well after 1922.

The above historicities illustrate that after the March First Independence Movement, the Korean movements in Japan began to transform into one centered on the workers, at least by the beginning of 1922. The purpose of this study is to revisit the organizational processes and activities of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan (hereafter referred to as the General Union), which was formed vis-à-vis the unification of the various labor organizations by Koreans in Japan[4] throughout different regions, to examine the lives of Korean residents in Japan and the struggle for national liberation after 1922.

Research on the history of Korean residents in Japan during the Japanese colonial period has accumulated to some notable extent. In the 1950s, for example, studies were conducted to analyze the causes and processes of Koreans coming to Japan, and to explain the footsteps of the resistance movements for national liberation under the exploitation and pressure by Japan (C. Kang 1957; C. Pak 1957; K. Pak 1957a). These studies belong to the histories of travel/migration and of movements, conducted both to overcome the discrimination and contempt against Koreans living in Japan and identify the Korean movements in Japan.

In the 1960s, most research on the issue was centered on unearthing the truth of the massacre of Koreans after the Great Kanto Earthquake and the practice of forced mobilization of Koreans, as well as on exposing the general colonial crimes of Japan, elucidating the damage—and the sheer extent thereof—heaped upon the Koreans in Japan. There was a demand to reveal the damage precipitated by the innumerable abuses and massacres during the Japanese colonial period as the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea was signed in the 1960s, which seemed to render imminent the risk of a re-invasion by Japan. Most of the aforementioned studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s were by Korean scholars living in Japan. This means that there had been a kind of vacuum in Japanese

[3] Regarding the Nakatsugawa incident, please refer to Satō 1985, 59–96.

[4] In this article, the terms "Korean residents in Japan" and "Korean-Japanese" denote Koreans who migrated to and lived in Japan due to Japanese colonial rule, and Koreans who worked in Japan for national liberation and independence of Korea.

historical research, which had failed to treat as a historical subject the history of Koreans in Japan.[5]

[5] As an exception, Tōru (1954) also describes the struggle of Koreans in Japan. However, it cannot be overlooked that the Korean labor movement in Japan is viewed as following the Japanese labor movement.

However, influenced by the aforementioned movements toward illuminating historical truths, certain Japanese historians and citizens also emerged to reveal the crimes of Japanese imperialism, and in the 1970s the colonial damage suffered by the Koreans living in Japan and the facets of their actual living conditions as well as movements began to be clarified. Regarding the history of movements, the Association of the History of Korean Movements in Japan was established in 1976, and a compendium of studies called *Zainichi chōsenjinshi kenkyū* [Research on the history of Koreans living in Japan] was published in 1977, shedding light upon related materials and factual aspects of the numerous Korean movements throughout various regions of Japan. In addition, the studies by Iwamura Toshio and Pak Kyŏng-sik presented facts and theoretical premises for a comprehensive explanation of the history of the Korean movements in Japan, and in this sense, became the matrix for future pertinent research (Iwamura 1972; K. Pak 1979).

In the 1980s, studies on the history of travel/migration, that of movements, and colonial damage continued to accumulate, while research based on methodologies of social history and the history of everyday life was heavily promoted. In particular, that the oral histories of the involved parties were collected and enabled to show the aspects of lives and movements of the Koreans who suffered damage by colonial rule and/or led various movements in face of the particular historical context, eliciting significant progress in research. Studies were also conducted to reveal the structure and transformation process of the Korean communities in Japan (including the culture and the efforts to preserve said culture by the Koreans living in Japan), which were formed at a certain distance from Japanese society while maintaining a relationship with the Korean Peninsula (especially their hometowns) to some extent.

Studies using the above methods of the history of everyday life and of social history carry definitive significance, but there is one crucial drawback—that is, such an approach aimed to understand the movements or consciousness of

the people who did not or could not resist, premised on the critique that the understanding of the history of movements was constrained by the framework of resistance to Japanese colonial rule and focused on intellectuals. In other words, said approach attempted to see the people buried in history due to nationalism or ethno-centrism born in the narrativization of the history of movements. Tonomura Masaru's (2004) work, for example, is precisely based on this problematization. Indeed, although such studies were successful in revealing certain facts that had not been made visible vis-à-vis the history of movements, they still did not seek to situate such facts in the structure of the colonizer and the colonized; in other words, certain historicities were viewed only within the context of the confrontation between intellectuals and "the people."

To resolve this problem, it is imperative that light be shone upon the interrelationship between the Korean-Japanese intellectuals and "the people" who faced ethnic and class contradictions within the structure of Japanese colonial governance. This means analyzing the tensions and anxieties borne of how the movements unfolded amid conflicts surrounding the discourses toward national liberation and contradictions inherent in the lower ranks. Only through such an analysis can movement history be reconstructed into that which reflects the demands forwarded by "the people."

In this article, the aforementioned problem is re-contextualized by examining the organization and activities of the General Union, which played a significant part in the Korean national liberation movements in Japan and fought to defend the lives of Korean residents in Japan. The General Union was a federation of Korean labor unions established in various regions of Japan. As such, simply analyzing the processes of the organization and activities of the General Union does not diverge in any meaningful way from the framework innate in previous studies; in fact, what must be clarified is the Union's relationship with the struggles of local unions or workers. Already, some studies have been conducted on the movements by local associations and workers (see Chŏng 2001; Ga 2014; Hashizawa 1987; Horiuchi 1989; Ishizaka 1983; Kimu 1983; Suzuki 1981). As an extension,

this article examines the historical significance of the lives of Korean residents in Japan in the 1920s and the struggle for national liberation by illuminating the relationships between the movements in various parts of Japan and the General Union.

In the discussion, the aforementioned subject is analyzed through the lens of two problematics: first, what kind of conflicts did the General Union face in the struggle for national liberation and protection of the lives of the Koreans in Japan? and second, what conflicts did the Korean residents in Japan experience in the same historical context? In seeking to answer these questions, the first part of this article examines the organization and activities of the General Union from 1922 to 1925, a period from the establishment of the General Union and a couple years thereon, and the second deals with the time period of 1925–27, when the nature of the General Union became lucid.

Challenges of "Great Unity" and the Establishment of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan

Background of the Formation of Labor Organizations and Unions

As mentioned previously, the General Union was formed by rallying and organizing different labor associations established throughout various regions of Japan. Therefore, it is essential to focus on and clarify the situations of Korean workers in those various loci as well as the regional labor associations and their activities; this is not easy, in light of the sheer breadth of information from numerous regions. To effectively manage the parameters, herein the examination is undertaken of the regions related to the establishment of the General Union in major cities, namely Tokyo, Osaka, Hyogo, and Kyoto.

Even before the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, Koreans traveled to Japan for work.[6] However, the remarkable increase in the number of those migrating for work began

[6] For further details, please refer to Hiroshi et al. 1994.

around 1917 before the end of World War I. As the demand for Japanese industrial products rose with the backdrop of the war, and the purchase and exploitation of land owned by Korean farmers after the Japanese land survey project caused the Koreans to lose their land, the displaced were mobilized for labor at low wages.[7] Table 1 shows a list of Japanese companies that hired Koreans at the time; it can be seen at a glance that Koreans were recruited and hired beginning in 1916–17. Table 2 delineates the number of Koreans traveling/migrating to Japan, of those returning/being repatriated to Korea, and of those staying to reside in Japan; the numbers here also confirm the increase from 1916 to 1917.

[7] The Japanese government mentioned the reason for the increase in the number of Koreans in Japan as follows. "The increase is due to various manufacturing industries and companies in industrial areas such as Osaka, Kobe, and Fukuoka, which are suddenly emerging centers due to the war, began to recruit Koreans in order to compensate for the shortage of workers in Japan" (K. Pak 1975; Security Division of the National Police Agency 1925).

Table 1. Companies Hiring Koreans, 1911–17

Area	Companies	Beginning of employment
Osaka	Settsu Spinning	1911
	Kizugawa Plant	1914
	Toyo Spinning Sankenya Factory	March 1916
	Sumitomo Cast Steel Works	June 1917
	Amaritazu Corporation	June 1917
	Nitta Shipyard	July 1917
	Settsu Spinning Hirano Factory	July 1917
	Nagatoda Shipyard	September 1917
Hyogo	Kibi Shipyard	June 1912
	Settsu Spinning Akashi Factory	April 1914
	Kawasaki Shipyard	June 1916
	Kobe Steel Works	May 1917
	Fukushima Spinning and Decorating Plant	May 1917
	Kawasaki Shipyard Branch Factory	September 1917
	Mitsubishi Kobe Shipyard	August 1917
	Kishimoto Nail Works	
	Harima Shipyard	
Wakayama	Asahi Chemical Industry Co., Ltd.	January 1916
	Inland Sea Spinning Plant	October 1916
	Wakayama Spinning Factory	November 1916
	Kiyo Textile Factory	November 1916
	Yura Dye Factory	August 1917
Mie	Nisshide Spinning Plant	September 1917
	Mie Wood Distillation Plant	January 1916
	Kichi Cotton Mill	January 1917
	Toyo Spinning Co., Ltd.	July 1917
	Hiramatsu Wool Factory	July 1917
Okayama	Ohashi Foundry Toyokan	October 1917
	Phosphorus Factory	November 1913
	Kurabo Bay Plant	July 1917
	Kibi Textile Company	September 1917
	Kuramibun Tamashima Factory	November 1917
	Ishii Textile Factory	November 1917

Source: Takeda Yukio, "Naichi zaijūhan tōnin mondai" [Problem of peninsular residents in the mainland] (research report by Yoshizaka Shunzo, Plant Supervisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce), *Shakaisēsakujihō* 213 (June 1938): 104–105.

Table 2. Number of Korean Visitors, Repatriates, and Residents

Year	No. of visitors	No. of repatriates	No. of residents	Year	No. of visitors	No. of repatriates	No. of residents
1911			2,527	1921	38,118	25,536	38,651
1912			3,171	1922	70,462	46,326	59,722
1913			3,635	1923	97,397	89,745	80,415
1914			3,542	1924	122,215	75,430	118,152
1915			3,917	1925	131,273	112,471	129,870
1916			5,624	1926	91,092	83,709	143,798
1917	14,012	3,927	14,502	1927	138,016	93,991	165,286
1918	17,910	9,305	22,411	1928	166,286	117,522	238,102
1919	20,968	12,739	26,605	1929	153,570	98,275	275,206
1920	27,492	27,497	30,189	1930	95,491	107,771	298,091

Source: Morita Yoshio, "Senzen ni okeru zainichi chōsenjin no jinkōtōkei" [Prewar demography of Koreans in Japan), *Chōsen gakuhō* 48 (1968): 63–77. 48 (1968): 66–69.

Many of these Koreans' sojourns to Japan were due to the recruitment by Japanese companies. However, recruitment took place under certain restrictions. On April 24, 2013, the Japanese Governor-General of Korea issued Ordinance No. 210 titled "Matters Concerning Regulation of Recruitment of Workers Engaged in Business on the Mainland." If a Japanese company were to recruit and hire more than ten Koreans, it had to apply for authorization from the head of the prefectural police. Issued on January 29, 1918, Ordinance No. 6 of the Japanese Governor-General of Korea, "Rules on the Recruitment and Withdrawal of Workers," states that the fundamental system was changed from "authorization" to "permission," and the contents of the application became extremely stringent.[8] In such a way, the recruitment of Korean workers by Japanese companies was entirely and effectively managed by the Japanese Governor-General of Korea.

Meanwhile, the Home Ministry (especially the Security Bureau) tried to manage Koreans who traveled to Japan as subjects of "security concern." On October 28, 2013, the Home Ministry issued the "Korean National Identification Data" and summarized the characteristics of Koreans in meticulous detail so that security authorities could readily identify Koreans. With such data, on July 1, 2016, the Home Ministry Ordinance No. 618 ("Requirements for Inspection of Korean Visitors") was issued, and Koreans who propagated anti-Japanese ideologies as well as those seemingly at risk of doing so were specially monitored. In this way, the Japanese Governor-General of Korea and the Home Ministry played an

[8] Regarding the provisions of the Japanese Governor-General of Korea on the recruitment of Korean workers, please refer to Mizuno 1992.

essential role in managing Koreans not only on the peninsula, but also on the Japanese mainland.

However, the number of Koreans traveling to Japan continued to increase, as no countermeasures had much effect under the conditions created by colonial rule and exploitation. In 1919, the March First Independence Movement erupted, and the Governor-General of Korea responded with Ordinance of the Governor-General's Police Department No. 3 called "Matters Concerning Travel Control for Koreans" in April 1919, to more effectively manage the voyage of Koreans. Often referred to as the "Travel Certificate System," if one were to travel outside of Korea, it was mandatory to present the certificate to the police officer at the origin of travel (Korea) after receiving the certificate from the police station in a jurisdiction (mainland Japan) to which one sought to travel. Such a system still failed to demonstrate much effect under the historical pressures in which the contradictions of colonial rule were not resolved, and in fact, on December 15, 1922, the system was abolished once. Table 2 above illustrates the drastic increase in the number of Korean travelers after 1922, and such an increase served to foster the formation of organizations for Koreans living in Japan and labor unions for Korean Workers in Japan.

Yet another impetus for the formation of organizations and labor unions for Koreans in Japan can be found in the employment and living conditions for Koreans living in Japan. First, an overwhelming majority of Koreans living in Japan were laborers. In fact, according to the government survey of 1918, of the 14,502 Koreans residing in Japan as of the end of December 2017, 11,397 people, or 79%, were recorded as laborers. Among the laborers, 1,870 were in Osaka, and 1,484 in Hyogo, which ranked first and third nationwide. Ranked second was Hokkaido, with 1,549 Koreans laborers, who are believed to have been mostly coal miners. In Tokyo, however, 436 out of 918 Koreans were students, and only 262 of the total (K. Pak 1975, 62–63). In addition, according to a 1921 survey, of the total Korean population of 32,274 as of June, the number of laborers had reached 62% (K. Pak 1975, 123). Among them, the factory workers were distributed as follows: 2,292 in Osaka, 941 in Hyogo, 721 in Kyoto, and 405 in Tokyo (523 in

Fukuoka). Of the general laborers, 972 were in Hyogo, 616 in Osaka, and 273 in Tokyo. There were also 1,285 in Fukuoka and 987 in Nagasaki, suggesting that there were numerous Korean laborers working in mines. At this time, Tokyo had the highest number of students, with 1,114 out of a total of 1,303 (K. Pak 1975, 128–132, 689). Since there are a great number of survey data on the employment status of Koreans in Japan, this article has thus far examined only the employment status during the period of increase in the number of Koreans in Japan; however, what is clear here is that the majority of Koreans in Japan were laborers, regardless of the specificity of occupation, and that though there were Korean workers in Tokyo, there the students outnumbered them. It can also be seen that there was a large number of factory workers in Kyoto, which indicates that the core industry was textiles (Suzuki 1981, 2). Most of these factory workers were unskilled laborers in small and medium-sized factories. Indeed, Kim Ho-yŏng, an activist of the General Union, pointed out, "The laborers at small-scale factories are not really different from the unemployed or vagrants" (Ch'oe 1930).

The living situations for the Korean workers were dire in general. First, the wages for Korean workers were only half that for Japanese workers. In 1928, for example, the average daily wage for Japanese construction workers was two yen thirty-four sen, whereas it was one yen one sen for Koreans. In the case of longshoremen, the average daily wage was two yen sixty-five sen for the Japanese, and one yen thirty-nine sen for the Koreans (K. Pak 1979, 97). Due to such low wages, Koreans in Japan were extremely poor. Eating was characterized as follows: "Nutrition cannot really be taken into account, as we live on rice, salt, and vegetables. There is seemingly a large volume of food, but at breakfast, we satisfy the stomach with soy sauce or salt, during the day, with pickled vegetables, and at night, with boiled fried tofu skin and vegetables, or dried fish" (K. Pak 1975, 689). Moreover, "All Japanese landlords hate to rent places to Koreans." For the non-contractual workers, "Even as some of us live in a city, we have a habit of gathering in a certain area bound by our common language and customs, and tend to be crowded into narrow places (K. Pak 1975, 155). In the case of industrial

workers, “They stay at company houses or accommodations in factories, or at boarding houses managed by Koreans, and most of the unskilled workers live in boarding houses, barracks, or temporary residences” (K. Pak 1975, 157). Such a horrific living situation precipitated a realistic demand for Korean residents in Japan to form a group or a labor union within the inveterate discriminatory structure of colonial oppression.

Formation of Labor Organizations and Unions

According to historical records, the first organization formed for the purpose of helping Korean residents in Japan was the Korean Friendship Association in Osaka (K. Pak 1975, 49). It is said that the Association was inaugurated on January 15, 1914, led by the student Kang Man-hyŏng, but was disbanded after only one month. However, on September 1 of the same year, about thirty-five Koreans gathered with Chŏng T’ae-shim at the helm and re-organized the Association. The Association held fourteen meetings until the end of May 1916, with an alternating general secretary. Although not much more can be confirmed in terms of activities aside from said meetings, Ra Kyŏng-sŏk, who conducted an on-site investigation of the Nakatsugawa incident in 1922, served as the general secretary at one point. The Association certainly served as the starting point for the formation of various other groups and unions. Moreover, though the career or occupation of the thirty-five members cannot be confirmed, what is clear is that most were students with strong nationalist ideologies. For example, Shin T’ae-kyun, who took office as the deputy secretary when the Association was re-formed with Chŏng T’ae-shim at the helm, was the founder of the Society of Korean Comrades, established on October 1, 1920, and distributed membership cards with the Korean flag to three-hundred people in disparate loci, rendering himself marked as a security threat by the Japanese authorities (Tsukazaki 2007).

In addition, in Osaka, labor unions were organized for the purpose of providing relief to workers. The Joint Alliance was formed in January 1916, and held two rallies every month to collect thirty sen each time for a communal fund to help the

sick or deceased workers (K. Pak 1975, 49). In August 1919, the Korean Savings Association was founded, and it was Pak Kyŏng-to, the operator of a boarding house, who organized the association (K. Pak 1975, 92). This suggests that unlike the organizations established by Korean students in Japan, the aforementioned were those organized by laborers, which demonstrates the possibility that the movements by Koreans had already developed into worker-centered ones before the March First Independence Movement.

Organizations for the purpose of helping workers can be found not only in Osaka, but also in Kyoto and Hyogo. For example, the Kyoto People's Association was founded on May 1, 1920.[9] The Association undertook projects for laborers such as job introduction, free accommodation, and relief for the sick.[10] What is particularly noteworthy is that though the chairman was Yi Sun-t'aek, a college student, the vice chairman (Pae Yong-sŏng) and the directors (Ri Yŏng-sik and Kim Sŏk-tong) were laborers; students and laborers led the Association together to conduct the relief work necessary. In June 1922, the Association was renamed Kyoto Korean Association and continued to carry out its projects, but later it fell into a state of dissolution and was ultimately managed by the Japanese.[11]

In Hyogo, and particularly in Kobe, the Korean Workers' Progressive Association was founded on May 20, 1920. The Association was organized with the agreement of four Koreans led by Kim Yŏng-won, who sold ginseng. The proponents were the students Ra Ch'u-gŏn (Kwansei Gakuin Middle School) and Kim Ŭi-yong (Kobe High School), as well as Chŏng Se-gwan, a handyman at the Kawasaki Shipyard, and Lee Ŭi-sŭng, a boarding house owner (K. Pak 1975). The Association seems to have conducted projects aimed at mutual connection, relief, and improvement of life among and between the Korean students and workers residing in Kobe. Although the specificities of their activities cannot be confirmed, it can be inferred that the Association was active to some extent from the fact that a banquet was held to commemorate Ra's achievements upon his sojourn home in 1922.[12] Then, in July 1922, the Kobe Korean Workers' Association was formed to unify small organizations that had already existed throughout

[9] Association of Korean Workers' Mutual Aid Associations in Kyoto, "Owŏl iril nodongjail-e p'albaek-ŭi jaeryu nodongja-ga" [On May Day, from eight hundred Korean-resident workers], *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 13, 1920; Prefectural governor's transfer document, "Kyōtofu chōsenjin no jōkyō" [The status of Koreans in Kyoto Prefecture], *Zainichi chōsenjinshi kenkyū* 6 (June 1980): 100–101.

[10] Provisional Meeting of the Korean Communist Association in Kyoto, "Shiboil-e sŏngdaehi kangyŏnhoe-kkaji yŏrŏ" [Holding a big lecture on the 15th]], *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 19, 1920.

[11] Prefectural governor's transfer document, "Kyōtofu chōsenjin no jōkyō" [The status of Koreans in Kyoto Prefecture], *Zainichi chōsenjinshi kenkyū* 6 (June 1980): 100–101.

[12] "Ra sūtashi sōbetsuen" [Farewell party for the Naoto Ken clan], *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 19, 1922.

Kobe. It is said that Kim Pyŏng-u, who was elected as the chairman at the third general meeting of the Korean Workers' Progressive Association, took the center stage in galvanizing the Kobe Korean Workers' Association.[13] Therefore, it can be said that the Kobe Korean Workers' Association would have inherited the projects undertaken by the Korean Workers' Progressive Association. Most noteworthy is that it opened a night school. According to a *Dong-A Ilbo* article published on July 29, 1922, "sixteen people who donated more than ten won, out of all the members who lived on the daily wage of a few dozen Japanese sen." It is believed that the Association was running the night school with such donations.[14]

As stated above, in places such as Osaka, Hyogo, and Kyoto, with a high number of workers, the students and the workers created the labor associations together; in contrast, in Tokyo, with its preponderant number of students, numerous student organizations or ideological associations were formed.

In November 1920, Pak Ryŏl and Paek Mu, among others, established the Korean Students Association. Members of the Association were extremely invested in the cultivation of ideologies and theories, as they had some connection to Sakai Toshihiko's Cosmo Club, Masamichi Takatsu's Enlightened People's Association, and Kazuo Kato's Freedom League, which were established around the same period. Meanwhile, on May Day in 1922, Song Pong-u and Paek Mu gave speeches, which impressed even the Japanese workers and, further, influenced the Japanese overall in one way or another.

In November 1921, the members of the Korean Students Association formed the Black Wave Society. However, influenced by the confrontation among the Japanese socialists, in November of the same year, the Society was divided into the anarchists' Black Friendship Society and the communists' North Star Society (see K. Pak 1975; 1979, 106). After the split, it was the North Star Society that promoted the organization of workers.

As noted earlier, it was only after the Nakatsugawa incident in 1922 that the Korean movements in Japan developed into movements centered on Korean workers. When the news of the Nakatsugawa incident broke out,

[13] "Sē susumukai tēkisōkai" [Regular general meeting of the progressive society], *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 17, 1922; "Paljŏn-hanŭn nouhoe: hoewon-ŭi kibu dasu" [The advancement of the labor association: the increase in members' donations], *Dong-A Ilbo*, July 29, 1922.

[14] "Paljŏn-hanŭn nouhoe: hoewon-ŭi kibu dasu" [The development of the labor association: the increase in members' donations], *Dong-A Ilbo*, July 29, 1922.

Yi Sang-hyŏp, a reporter for the *Dong-A Ilbo*, Ra Kyŏg-sŏk, who returned home after working as an activist in Osaka, and Kim Yak-su of the North Star Society launched an on-site investigation project.[15] Although the truth was not investigated by the Japanese Home Ministry or the police, a report meeting was held, and the Association of Investigation for Korean Workers in Japan (hereafter referred to as the Investigation Association) was inaugurated there. The specific activities have been relatively unknown, but it seems to have investigated the actual conditions of Korean workers in Fukuoka, Osaka, Nagoya, Hokkaido, Ishikawa, and Kanazawa.[16] After the Nakatsugawa incident occurred, the *Dong-A Ilbo* article on September 29, 1922, clearly illustrates that the Korean people were well aware that they were suffering in various places and propelled themselves toward organizing:

> Isn't it true that the local police were not able to detect the facts of the abuse when Ra Kyŏng-sŏk, who was dispatched as a member of the investigation of the Niigata case, was able to find answers in but just a few days? Is it that they haven't discovered it, or that they haven't even begun to investigate it. . . . The police have not fulfilled their responsibility of protecting the lives of the people and ensuring the safety of their beings, **so the rights of the Korean brethren should be defended by the unity of the Korean people, and the protection of the Korean brethren should be accomplished by Korean hands**. . . . It is true that only after **solid unity** can violence be restrained and the illogical rendered right through the power of the unity. Though we cannot claim that power is everything in the activities of humankind, **it truly can be the strongest weapon**.[17]

The investigators, who realized that unity was the "strongest weapon" through the Nakatsugawa incident, formed the Tokyo Federation of Labor on November 1, 1922, and the Osaka Labor Union Association on December 1 of the same year, beginning in earnest to organize the workers. In Kyoto, on January 15, 1925, the Kyoto Korean Labor Union Association was established, laying the foundation for the unification of

[15] For the investigation process, please refer to Satō 1985.

[16] "Tonggyŏng- e chojiktoel nodongja josahoe" [Organization for investigation of laborer situations in Tokyo], *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 13, 1922.

[17] "Chosŏnin nodongja chosa-e taehaya sahoe-ŭi tongjŏngshim-ŭl kuham" [Seeking sympathy from society for the investigation of Korean workers], *Dong-A Ilbo*, September 29, 1922. Emphases by the author.

labor unions throughout the region.

Tasks of "Great Unity" and the Establishment of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan

The General Union was founded on February 22, 1925. The inaugural statement contains the following passage:

> Needless to say, under the extremely developed capitalist system throughout the world, our class, who are exploited without fail, must **organize and unite with one another to ensure the safety of our lives**. In addition, it is true that the need for the general unity of individual organizations is not only absolute, but also already late. However, **though it has been more than three years since the double pressure upon and exploitation of the Korean workers, scattered throughout Japan like wandering vagrants after we bid farewell to our hometown, has rendered necessary the great unity of the different Korean labor unions. It has taken so long, of course, due somewhat to the internal weaknesses of our organizations, but more due to being heavily affected by the nefarious trickeries and obstruction by the exploitative class.** Therefore, in order to eradicate the exploitative class and destroy the irrational inequities of the present society, it is necessary to promote the truth of co-existence and **advance to the front of class warfare**. As a result of the recent consultations among the organizations in the Kanto and Kansai regions, the need for the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan is now ever greater and its completion is deeply appreciated.[18]

[18] "Zai nihon chōsen rōdō sōdōmē shushisho" [Statement of the intentions of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan], February 1925.

From the above can be examined three noteworthy aspects: (1) they organized as a means of survival; (2) it had been more than three years since they felt the need to unite the different Korean labor organizations; and (3) they felt the need to advance to the front of class warfare. The first and second aspects demonstrate that the Nakatsugawa incident was always in consideration. As demonstrated earlier, Korean workers in Japan organized labor associations in Tokyo,

Osaka, and Kyoto from the time when they recognized the unspeakable working conditions of the Koreans in Japan and felt that the workers themselves should unite to protect their lives and rights. However, it took longer than three years to unify the distinct organizations. The preparatory committee members of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan believed, "It has taken so long, of course, due somewhat to the internal weaknesses of our organizations, but more due to being heavily affected by the nefarious trickeries and obstruction by the exploitative class."

Just what are the trickeries and obstruction by the exploitative class referred to here? As properly answering this question necessitates more evidence than the space of this article allows, two hypotheses will be forwarded as follows. First, the organizers must have been referring to the massacre of Koreans during the Great Earthquake of Kanto. Though it is necessary to examine precisely just who comprises the exploitative class and what its exact mechanisms were for a proper contextualization, the tragedy in which about 6,000 Koreans were brutally slaughtered must have acted as a significant impetus. Second, the influence of pro-Japanese groups such as the Fraternity Society (Sangaehoe) must have played a crucial role. Sangaehoe was established in Tokyo on December 23, 1921, by Yi Ki-dong and Pak Ch'un-gŭm. Its establishment was sponsored by the Governor-General of Korea, and after the Great Earthquake of Kanto, in particular, the organization expanded its impact through volunteer work.[19] Even in the investigation report of the Governor-General of Korea is recorded, "little activities are seen except for those of a Sangaehoe branch." In reality, it must have been difficult to enfold the workers belonging to the Sangaehoe into any labor union independent of it.

In regard to the third aspect noted above, a question lingers: why did they prioritize class interests above national liberation or Korean independence in the face of discrimination by the Japanese in the field of labor and the dire living situations of the Korean people, as well as the massacre of the Koreans during the Great Earthquake of Kanto? The codes of conduct proclaimed at the inaugural meeting of the General Union is often seen as intimately

[19] This can be confirmed in "Yakeatono katazukeni senjin no daikatsudō san byakumēga mushōde hataraku" [Senjin's large-scale activities to clean up the burnt wrecks: three hundred people work for free], *Osaka Asahi Shimbun*, September 14, 1923, as well as in other sources.

related to the codes of the General Alliance of Labor in Japan.[20] The General Union appears to have been emphasizing its partnership with Japanese labor unions at the time of its foundation, but it is necessary to examine what the reason was, which can be gleaned in the course of the activities of the General Union. As such, the significance of the emphasis on advancing to the front of the class warfare should be closely examined.

General Union of Korean Workers in Japan as a "National Unity Party"

1) Problem of Partnership with the Japanese Working Class

The meaning of the General Union's emphasis on advancing to the class warfare front is closely entwined with the issue of partnership with the Japanese working class. To understand the meaning of this more clearly, two events must be focused here.

The first is the struggle against military training conducted at Hokkaido's Otaru Commercial High School. On October 15, 1925, for a military drill at Otaru Commercial High School was distributed a preliminary statement that claimed that anarchists instigated an uprising by the Korean residents, using the Great Earthquake of Kanto as bait.[21] As the military training at Otaru Commercial High School was to re-enact the massacre of Koreans in the time of the Great Earthquake of Kanto, there were demonstrations against the drill. The General Union also distributed a manifesto and staged protests. On October 23, 1925, the General Union distributed the leaflet titled "To Join the Japanese Proletariat" to the Japanese labor associations or fraternity organizations. It is noteworthy that the attitude of the General Union on its partnership with the Japanese working class is expressed in the manifesto:

> We have never expected the **Japanese bourgeoisie** to treat us with justice. **It may seem right to the corrupted ones** to ○○ (*sic.*) [massacre] the Koreans the year before last during the Great Earthquake, and then to practice the

[20] A comparison of the codes:
A. The Code of the General Union (K. Pak 1975, 219).
① We are an organization of unity and mutual assistance to promote class equality and knowledge.
② We are determined to fight the oppression and persecution of the capitalist class with courage and effective tactics.
③ We are convinced that the working class and the capitalist class are incompatible, and we are committed to the complete liberation of the working class and the construction of a gentleman's association of free equality by the skills of the labor union.

B. The Code of the Japanese Workers' Union (1922) (Tōru 1954, 25).
① We are committed to fighting the oppression and persecution of the capitalist class with determined courage and effective tactics.
② We confirm that the working class and the capitalist class are incompatible.
③ We are committed to the complete liberation of the working class and the construction of a new society of free equality with the skills of the labor union.

[21] "Mun'gyo tangguk-ŭl kyut'an sŭjŭk'i soryŏng-ŭi sowi kun'gyo sangjŏng ot'aru kang tanch'e-ŭi punbal / ch'uga yogu sajŏng taejangsŏng chugyeguk" [Major Suzuki's so-called military school proposal, Otaru organizations' efforts/additional demands: State Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Finance], *Dong-A Ilbo*, October 21, 1925.

○○ (*sic.*) [massacre] of Koreans even today when there is no earthquake.

But we appeal to the proletarians of Japan. Gentlemen, **demonstrate your proletarian attitude** toward these evils! **Proclaim that you are not Japanese like the bourgeois Japanese!**[22]

[22] Ohara Institute for Social Research, *Nippon musan kaikyū ni azuka fu* [Join the Japanese Proletariat], October 23, 1925.

The manifesto first points out that the military exercises were carried out by the Japanese bourgeoisie. It suggests that amidst the idea that it may be thought of as justifiable for the corrupt, namely the Japanese bourgeoisie, to practice the massacre of Koreans, the organization must join hands not with such bourgeoisie, but with the working class of Japan. As such, the manifesto appeals to "proletarian attitude" as well as the sentiment "that you are not Japanese like the bourgeois Japanese."

On October 27, 1925, Chi Kŏn-hong and Ŏ P'a, executives of the General Union, were dispatched to comfort the anxious Korean workers.[23] The General Union responded to protect the Korean workers in face of the danger to their lives. In the midst of this situation, it would have been necessary to cooperate with the Japanese workers so that they did not become the tips of fingers, so to speak, of the Japanese bourgeoisie.

[23] "Ot'aru-e puwŏn p'agyŏn nodongwŏn wian-ŭro" [Dispatch of members to Otaru for the consolation of the Korean laborers], *Dong-A Ilbo*, November 1, 1925.

The second event is the protest against the massacre of the Korean people in Kinomotocho in Mie Prefecture. On January 3, 1926, two Korean workers were slaughtered by the Japanese people in Kinomotocho. Following the rumor that "Koreans are trying to annihilate Kinomotocho," Japanese legionnaires, fire brigade, and vigilantes attacked the bunkhouse where approximately sixty Korean workers lived, surrounded two Koreans workers, and murdered them (C. Kim 1988).[24] The fact that the townspeople believed the rumor and slaughtered Koreans shows close similarity to the cause of the massacre of Koreans during the Great Earthquake of Kanto.

[24] The slaughter did not occur at the same time, but at different times and places.

On January 18, ten Korean-Japanese groups organized the Mie Prefecture Incident Investigation Group and decided that Shin Chae-yong of the General Union should

be dispatched as an investigator.[25] On February 12, a speech was held to report the results of the investigation, but the police stopped the speech and detained the audience.[26] Under these circumstances, the General Union and three other organizations printed approximately fifty-thousand leaflets that stated the truth of the incident and sent them to the Pan-Japan Proletarian Organization.[27] The leaflet was titled "An Appeal to all Japanese Proletariat on the Mie Prefecture Stabbing Incident." In it, there is not only a strong criticism of the Japanese workers, but also a sense of conflict regarding the pan-alliance of the proletariat.

> This truth is that **it was nothing less than the slaughter of the Korean working class as a weak group by the Japanese bourgeoisie**. The Japanese bourgeoisie completely absorbed the people of the countryside as they expanded their territory. Not only did Kinomotocho in Mie Prefecture, the place where the incident occurred, fall under such bourgeois command, but **the townspeople learned that they had an obligation to act like bourgeois puppets, and in fact were proud to do so**. Organized by such people were the vigilantes, the fire brigade, and legionnaires, who always treat ethnic minorities with vulgar reactionary nationalism. **There is, of course, a large number of workers among them. However, there is no one with an enlightened class consciousness**, and such an unenlightened person becomes a person who holds the fire of reaction and becomes a subordinate, low-ranking swordsman.
>
> **We were awakened from ethno-national prejudice long ago and cried out for class unity. But that hope was not to be reached immediately. So what's happening here has to be a pushback in reaching that demand and class unity. Our path to survival has been obstructed. The brutal swords of the bourgeoisie everywhere send us day by day toward the precipice of life and death. Only when we are out of such a state can we guarantee the courage to go on a life of truth. There is something already engraved in our bones. But we**

[25] "Shipkae tanch'e-ŭi pun'gi-ro sagŏnjosahoe chojik samjyunghyŏnsagŏn-gwa tonggyŏng-ŭi kak tant'ye chosawŏn iin p'agyŏn kyŏljŏng" [Organization of the Investigation Committee on the case of the Immigration Control Act: Mie Prefecture Incident and each organization in Tokyo decision to dispatch two investigators], *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 23, 1926. The ideological organization January Society's Sin T'ae-ak was also dispatched.

[26] "Progress of the fact-finding mission for the Mie Prefecture Incident dissolved], *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 17, 1926.

[27] "Chŏn'guk musan'gyegŭp-ege ppira omanmae paep'o" [Distribution fifty thousand copies of leaflets for the nation's proletariat class], *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 22, 1926. The three organizations in addition were the Federation of Proletarian Youths in Tokyo, the January Society, and the March Society.

admonish ourselves of self-abandonment and launch an organized battle. There's always something hot in our blood. However, we abandon our favoritism and follow international unity.

"The greatest benefit to our proletarian class lies in the handshake and unity with the same class!"[28]

[28] Ohara Institute for Social Research, "Mieken bokusatsujiken ni saishi zen nihon musan kaikyūni uttaefu" [Appeal to the pan-Japan proletariat regarding the Mie Prefectural Killing Incident], February 20, 1926.

The manifesto stipulates that the massacre of the Korean workers as a weak ethnic group is the massacre of the Korean proletarians by the Japanese bourgeoisie. In other words, it is a slaughter based on the contradictions of reactionary nationalism. The statement, "The townspeople learned that they had an obligation to act like bourgeois puppets, and in fact were proud to do so," points to the murder of Korean workers as part of the weak ethnicity directly at hands of the Japanese workers who should have in fact been in unity with the Korean workers. Another statement, "There is no one with enlightened class consciousness," indicates a situation in which even the Japanese people of the exploited class were oppressing Koreans. In this way, the manifesto demonstrates a critical attitude toward the Japanese workers, highlights the miserable conditions suffered by the Koreans, and makes appeals for the continued advance toward the front of the class warfare. However, such an advancement was possible only after "admonishing against self-abandonment" and "abandon[ing] favoritism and follow[ing] international unity."

Through the two cases above, it can be confirmed that the partnership with the Japanese working class was raised as a real task. It was thought that advancing to the class front was a way to overthrow the Japanese bourgeoisie and solve the task of liberating the class as well as the people.

2) Disputes of the Korean Workers in Japan and the General Union

The problem facing the General Union was not just its partnership with the Japanese working class. It also faced the behemoth task to end the discriminatory treatment of Korean workers in Japan on the labor site. Here, this article examines

the conflicts experienced by the Korean residents in Japan and the response of the General Union through the form and progress of labor disputes of 1925–26.

Table 3. Number of Labor Disputes

Year	Cases											
	Wage demand		Request for reinstatement of laid-off workers		Opposition to lower wages/ request for raise		Request for severance pay		Miscellaneous		Total	
	No. of cases	No. of people	No. of cases	No. of people	No. of cases	No. of people	No. of cases	No. of people	No. of cases	No. of people	No. of cases	No. of people
	18	650	2	34	6	271	1	38	19	82	46	1,075
	19	1,235	5	52	18	2,197	29	390	13	602	84	4,476

Source: K. Pak 1995, 198, 241.

Table 4. Results of the Labor Disputes

Year	Resolution method / Course of motion	Fulfilment of demands	Partial concessions and compromises	Withdrawal of demand / refusal by employer	Police / third party arbitration	Unresolved (natural lapse)	Total	Remarks (No. of supports)
1925	Strike	1	3	—	—	1	5	Korean Organization 1
	Work slow-down	1	1	—	1	—	3	Korean Organization 2 Japanese Organization 1
	Negotiation	4	14	2	18	—	38	Korean Organization 7
	Total	6	18	2	19	1	46	
1926	Strike	4	9	5	3	—	21	Korean Organization 3
	Work slow-down	1	—	1	—	—	2	Korean Organization 1
	Demonstration	—	2	—	—	—	2	Korean Organization 2
	Negotiation	18	31	7	11	[6]	73	Korean Organization 37 Japanese Organization 4
	Total	23	42	13	14	6	98	

Source: K. Pak 1995, 198, 241.

Table 3 delineates the number of labor disputes, the number of participants, and the causes of the labor disputes in 1925 and 1926, and Table 4 lists the forms and results of the disputes in the same years.

From January to October in 1925, the number of labor disputes by Korean workers in Japan is recorded as forty-six cases involving 1,075 participants. By cause, there were eighteen cases and 650 people involved in requests for wage payment, two requests and thirty-four people for reinstatement of laid-off workers, six requests and 271 people against wage cuts and requests for wage hikes, one request and thirty-eight people for severance pay, and nine requests and eighty-two people involved for miscellaneous causes. By form, there were five strikes, three slow-downs, and thirty-eight negotiations. The results were six cases of demands met, eighteen cases of compromise, two cases of demand withdrawal or employer rejection, nineteen cases of police or third-party arbitration, and one case unresolved.

According to the survey from January to October 1926, eighty-four labor disputes and 4,476 participants were reported, and compared to the survey conducted in 1925, the numbers of cases and of participants increased by thirty-eight and 3,401, respectively. By cause, there were nineteen cases and 1,235 people for wage payment, five cases and fifty-two people against dismissal, eighteen cases and 2,197 people for opposition to wage cuts and demands for wage increase, twenty-nine cases and 390 people for severance pay, and thirteen cases and 602 people for miscellaneous causes. In regards to form, there were eighteen strikes, two slow-downs, two demonstrations, and sixty-two negotiations. The results were twenty-three cases of demands met, forty-two cases of concession or compromise, thirteen cases of demand withdrawal or employer rejection, six cases of unresolved cases, and fourteen cases of settlement by the police and/or third-party arbitration.

What can be gleaned through the data presented in the tables is that the number of disputes doubled, and the number of participants quadrupled from 1925 to 1926. Moreover, the majority of the conflicts was due to wage issues and related problems thereof. Yet another noteworthy aspect is that

most of the organizations that supported such disputes were Korean organizations. Although the specificities of each of the above disputes are not available, there are some data suggesting that the eruption of the labor disputes in 1925 was mostly spontaneous. In March 1925, at the construction site in Kanagawa, about seventy Korean workers "abruptly sought" payment for the work for which the contractor failed to pay.[29] In June, there was another incident in which a number of Korean workers who were seething at the wage gap between them and the Japanese workers took the matter upon themselves and assaulted the Japanese (Ishizaka 1983, 45).

In contrast, several cases of systematic labor disputes can be identified in 1926. In October, about one-hundred fifty Korean workers staged a dispute over the dismissal of fourteen workers in Shiga Prefecture.[30] In October of the same year, there was a dispute for the dismissed Korean labor union leader in Hyogo, and in December, a speech session was organized, in which Ryu Jong-ryul of the Kobe Korean Workers' Union, Kim Kwang and An Chong-gil of the Osaka Korean Workers' Union, and Chŏng Tong-p'a of the General Union gave speeches in support (Horiuchi 1989, 28). In December, in Kanagawa, four members of the Korean Workers' Union in Tokyo fought for the medical expenses of their injured colleague.[31]

There is not enough material to prove that the labors disputes in 1925 and 1926 transformed from a spontaneously occurring form to an organized one. However, the increase in the number of disputes as well as in the number of participants and the involvement of the different Korean labor organizations confirmed in the data indicate that the dissatisfaction with or conflict over the discrimination of Korean workers in Japan was starting to become systematically resolved.

3) General Union of Korean Workers in Japan as a "National Unity Party"

In February 1925, when the inaugural meeting of the General Union was held, the different labor associations affiliated were eleven in total.[32] Then, as of the end of October of the

[29] "Nanajūyomēni osowaharu dokōchin gin fubarai hi" [Delayed payment of nearly 70 construction workers' wages], *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, March 6, 1925.

[30] "Tongp'o maengp'a sŭngni yogu tyogŏndaero chyŏnbu sŭngni ilbon chahahyŏn och'ŏnyujang chaengŭi hubo" [Post-dispute report of the Okukawa Oil Field, Shiga Prefecture, Japan. All demands met], *Dong-A Ilbo*, October 9, 1926.

[31] "Senjin yonmē bōkōsu kēhin den tetsugaishae oshikake" [Four Koreans assaulted Keihin Electric Railway Company], *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, December 29, 1926.

[32] According to "Taishō jūyonen'chūni o keruzairyū chōsen'jin'no jōkyō" [Status of Koreans residing in Japan during the 14th year of the Taisho era] (K. Pak 1975, 167–168), eleven following organizations became affiliated: Kyoto Federation of Korean Workers' Unions (Kyoto), Tokyo Korean Workers' Coexistence Association (Tokyo), Osaka Light Society (Osaka), Seisei Korean Workers' Union (Osaka), Imafuku Korean Labor Union (Osaka), Joto Korean Workers' Union (Osaka), Sakai Korean Workers' Comrade Association (Osaka), Tokyo Federation of Korean Workers' Unions (Tokyo), Osaka Federation of Korean Workers' Unions (Osaka), Tokyo Korean Worker's Union (Tokyo), and Tsurumachi Korean Workers' Union (Osaka).

same year, there were twelve organizations affiliated (Table 5).

Table 5. Organizational Status after the Inaugural Meeting (End of October 1925)

	Area	Member associations	No. of members	Names of executives
General Union of Korean Workers in Japan (800 Members) Yi Hŏn Nam Taek-wan	Tokyo	Tokyo Korean Workers' Union	250	Hŏ Gŏn-hun, Kim Han-gyŏng
		Association for the Coexistence of the Workers' Union of Korea	80	Yi Ji-yŏng, Kim Sang-ch'ŏl
	Kyoto	Kyoto Korean Workers' Union	70	Kim Pyŏng-gyu, Cho Hŭn-sun
	Hyogo	Kobe Korean Workers' Union	90	Yi Jong-mo, Yu Yong-chu
	Osaka Osaka Federation of Trade Unions (650 members) Song Chang-bok Chi Kŏn-hong Kim Tal-hwan	Osaka Federation of Korean Workers	50	Song Chang-bok, Chi Kŏn-hong
		Sakai Korean Workers' Comrade Association	160	Kim Hyŏn-t'ae
		Young People's Association of Korean Workers' Comrades of Sakai	50	Chang Chin
		Osaka Nishinari Korean Workers' Union	250	Kim Tal-hwan
		Osaka Joto Workers' Union	55	Shin Tae-yong
		Tsurumachi Korean Workers' Union	70	Song Chang-bok
		Izumio Korean Workers' Union	60	Chi Chae-gŭn
		Imafuku Korean Workers' Union	55	Kim Tal-hwan

Source: K. Pak 1995, 161–162.

Worth noting here is that the Kobe Korean Workers' Union was affiliated. The Union was founded on March 29, 1925, after the establishment of the General Union.[33] There is a record that Yi Hŏn, the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the General Union, participated in the formation of the Kobe Korean Workers' Union, which seems to have been organized under consultation with the General Union as well (K. Pak 1975, 168). It is presumed that the intention was to form labor associations in regions with a significant number of laborers and ultimately to realize the unification of the different associations. However, at this stage, there was no further development than aligning the Kobe Korean Workers' Union with the General Union.

[33] "Chaeilbon kobe chosŏn nodong dongmaenghoe kangu-ŭi danch'e ch'amyŏ-ro sŏnghwangni-e ch'angnip" [The Kobe Korean Labor Union in Japan was established successfully with the participation of friendship groups], *Dong-A Ilbo*, April 8, 1925.

Table 6. Early Conditions Post-Second Conference (End of October 1926)

	Alliance	Area	Member associations	No. of members	Names of executives
General Union of Korean Workers in Japan (9,900 members) Yi Hŏn Nam Taek-wan	Kanto Korean Federation of Labor (1,400 members) Kim Ch'ŏn-hae Ch'oe Mu-il Kim Yun-su	Tokyo	Workers' Union of Korea	96	Im Mu, Han Tae-ch'ŏl
			Kanto Korean Workers' Association	600	Kim Yun-su
			Tokyo Workers' Coexistence Association	80	Yi Su-Ch'ŏl
			Joint Workers Association of Korea	250	Yi Chi-yŏng
			Tokyo Korean Workers' Association	47	Kim Sang-ch'ŏl
			Korean Red Star Workers' Union	175	Yi To
			Korean Workers' Association	70	Ch'oe Sa-sŏn
			Tokyo Federation of Trade Union	42	Mun Ch'ŏl
			Korean Federation of Red Guard Workers	50	Sŏ Kwang-hae Nam Yŏng-u Kim Chŏng-guk Yi Kwang-ch'un Ko Hŭng Kim Ch'ŏng-p'ung Ch'oe Se-ch'ang Ch'oe Rak-chong Kim Ki-u Yi Un-su [PLEASE SPECIFY WHO IS THE EXECUTIVE OF WHICH ASSOCIATION?]
		Kanagawa	Joint Workers' Association of Korea	25	Mun Sŏk-chu, Kim Hak-ŭi
		Yamanashi	Yamanashi Korean Workers' Union	33	Im Yun-pyŏng, Ku Hyŏn
	Kansai Korean Federation of Labor (930 members) Chi Kŏn-hong Kim Sang-hyŏk	Osaka	Sakai Korean Workers' Comrade Association	160	Kim Hyŏn-t'ae, Ha Sang-ho
			Osaka Federation of Korean Workers' Unions (Korean Workers' Union in Osaka)	50	Song Chang-bok, Chi Kŏn-hong
			Tsurumachi Korean Workers' Union	70	Song Chang-bok, Yun Kŏn-du
			Izumio Korean Workers' Union	60	Chi Chae-gŭn, Chŏng Ch'ang-nam
			Imafuku Korean Workers' Union	55	Kim Tal-hwan, Chu Tŏk-san
			Osaka Nishinari Korean Workers' Union	250	Kim Tal-hwan, Ch'oe Pyŏng-t'ae
			Osaka Naniwa Korean Workers' Union	180	Kang U-bak, Kim Kwang-hae
			Osaka Tennoji Korean Workers' Union	80	Kim Ki-yŏng, Kang Sŏk-chong
			Federation of Korean Workers' Unions	100	Shin Ch'ŏn-man, Han Sang-ch'ae
		Kyoto	Kyoto Federation of Korean Workers' Unions	170	Kim Pyŏng-jik, Cho Ki-dong
		Hyogo	Federation of Korean Workers' Union	90	Yi Chung-hwan, Chŏng Sun-gyŏng
		Gifu	Central Korean Workers' Union	40	Kim Myŏng-shik, Yi San-gun

Source: K. Pak 1995, 216.

Table 6 presents the organizational status of the General Union as of the end of October 1926; it can be seen that the labor unions of Kanagawa, Yamanashi, and Gifu became affiliated with the General Union.

During this period, in Kanagawa, the number of laborers was overwhelmingly high. As of the end of June 1925, 5,360 out of the total population of 6,212 Koreans in Kanagawa were laborers (K. Pak 1975, 188), and as of the end of June 1926, 5,644 out of the total population of 6,728 were laborers (K. Pak 1975, 230). In the city of Yokohama, in Kanagawa Prefecture, the Yokohama Federation of Korean Workers, which organized these workers, was formed in July 1925 (Ishizaka

1983, 44; Kimu 1983, 14–15). However, at the end of October 1925 (Table 5), it had yet to become affiliated with the General Union. According to Kim Ch'ŏn-hae, who was organizing the Korean workers in Yokohama, "This is because it is difficult to go to Yokohama and immediately create a labor union" (Higuchi 2014, 45). In fact, it was not until 1925 that it was possible to confirm that the number of Korean workers in Kanagawa had increased, and in order to organize them, it would have been necessary to create it from some kind of institution that was already helping the laborers. The reason that the Yokohama Federation of Korean Workers was able to join the General Union in 1926 can be said to be because activists such as Kim Ch'ŏn-hae achieved a certain extent of unity among the Korean workers.

By the end of October 1926, the Yamanashi Korean Labor Union had also become affiliated with the General Union, but as Yamanashi was a regional stronghold of the Sangaehoe, the affiliation did not seem to garner satisfactory results (Kimu 1983, 14–15).

From these trends can be understood that the General Union, since its foundation, was organizing mainly in areas where Korean workers in Japan were relatively heavily concentrated, and that to some extent, the Union expanded to resolve conflicts directly at the labor sites.

In addition to expanding its base and absorbing the different local labor unions, the General Union was also joining the struggle for the liberation of the Korean people from Japanese colonial rule and oppression. In January 1925, before the establishment of the General Union, the January Society was formed in Tokyo, spearheaded by Korean students.[34] In January of the same year, a youth organization called the Association of Korean Proletariat Youth of Tokyo was inaugurated, and later, in March, a women's organization, the March Society, was formed. Moreover, in early 1925, a number of ideological, labor, youth, and women's organizations in addition to the aforementioned were established in Tokyo (K. Pak 1975, 164–165, 213). The above four organizations issued a statement on the factional strife of the socialist movement organizations within Korea and settled the direction of the struggle in Japan.[35]

[34] "Puksŏnghoe haesan irwŏrhoe chojik" [Dissolution of the North Star Society and organization of the January Society], *Dong-A Ilbo*, January 6, 1925.

[35] "Seimeisho" [Manifesto], *Shisō undō* [Ideological Movement] 3 (1): 2–6.

The statement appealed for the unification of movements in each sector of Japan, as the Korean proletarian movement in Japan was part of the larger Korean proletarian movement unfettered by territoriality. In addition, the task of the workers was defined as "unifying and training the Korean workers in Japan as proletariat so as to simultaneously fight against the Japanese bourgeoisie and ideologically edify them, which is significant for not only the Korean social movements, but also Japanese social movements."

The General Union had the task of organizing and guiding Korean workers in Japan according to the contents set out in the statement. On January 12, 1927, the "Declaration on Change of Direction" was announced,[36] and the direction of movement was amended in accordance with the theory of "People's Front," which had emerged in Korea (Mizuno 1977). Ultimately, the change of direction was to form a "national unity party." In other words, the General Union would participate in the New Trunk Society (Singanhoe) movement.

In line with the context of the movement in Korea, the General Union clarified the nature of the movement at its Third Regular Convention. The Convention was held from April 20 to April 21, 1927, where the General Union proclaimed new declarations, codes, and regulations. In the code is expressed, "Political struggle is carried out under the leadership and spirit of the Korean proletariat, and national liberation is sought," and in the declaration, independent meaning was given to the situation of the Korean workers in Japan of the General Union.

> Our labor life is treated as being completely exclusive to that of the Japanese workers in Japan. Ethnic discrimination and abuse are our double whammy. Moreover, since the majority of us are non-contractual laborers, the form of the Union did not have standards by occupation and industry. Most of us are also in a transition period where it is virtually impossible to participate directly in Japan's labor unions due to language barriers, emotional discrepancies, differences in habits, and lack of knowledge, to name just a few among the issues. Our lives, however, are undeniably those of minimum wage,

[36] "Zai Nihon Chōsen rōdō sō dōmei seiji-bu no hōkō tenkan ni kansuru sengen" [Political wing of the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan], Seiji hihan [Political Criticism] 2 (March 1927): 102–105.

> and the entire region of Japan is one terrible factory for us. Therefore, our status is that of an ethno-national wage slave called the Korean workers. As a result of such discrimination, our consciousness has quickly become reflective and deepened. In other words, our consciousness is always attempting to find the purpose of the struggle on the political and power fronts, without much interest in the economic and collective worldview. Such an ethno-nationalist and class consciousness enable an even more courageous expression against imperialism. In fact, we have no choice but to do it in such a way.[37]

[37] "Zai nihon chōsen rōdō sōdōmē dai sankai taikai sengen' kōryō kiyaku" [Declaration of the Third Convention of the Korean Confederation of Labor in Japan, the Code, and the Covenant (April 20, 1927)], *Zainichi chōsenjinshi kenkyū* 1 (December 1977): 97.

The quoted passage signifies the core of the declaration. In other words, Korean residents in Japan cannot participate in class struggles in the same way that the Japanese workers can, but there is no substantive difference between the two in courageously fighting imperialism. The declaration is noteworthy for mentioning class characteristics precisely because there are conditions to fight within Japan all the while embodying the theory of "People's Front." Expressed in the declaration is the dilemma of the General Union, which advocated for the specific lives of Korean workers in Japan while developing the general struggle for national liberation.

Epilogue

The discussion in this article can be summarized as follows. Korean residents in Japan, who were relegated to base forms of life, organized a labor group with Korean students centered in Tokyo. The group, which was organized with the aim of cultivating ideology and theory, recognized the task of "great unity" in the wake of the Nakatsugawa incident, and based on such recognition was established the General Union of Korean Workers in Japan. Although the General Union valued the class warfare front at its founding, it faced questions such as coming up with a methodology for overthrowing the Japanese bourgeoisie and a core message propelling the defense of the lives of Korean residents in Japan. In various places, the labor

disputes unfolded with the wage problem as the central issue, and in order to resolve the on-site conflicts suffered by the Korean workers in Japan, the General Union promoted the systematization of different labor unions in various places. Meanwhile, the Union also shifted its direction to the task of becoming a "national unity party" to join the struggle for national unity in Korea. However, it was not a simple turn, but a careful change in direction with consideration for the specificities inherent in the conditions in Japan as well. Through the examination in this article can be witnessed the dilemma of the General Union, which struggled to solve two tasks: the general struggle for national liberation and the protection of the specific lives of Korean residents in Japan.

At the Fourth Profintern Convention in 1928, however, it was decided that Korean workers in Japan would be re-organized into the Japanese Workers' Union. As a result, the General Union dissolved its organization and joined the Japanese Workers' Union in 1930. As can be seen, the General Union did exist between 1928 and 1930, and the conflicts during this period should be carefully analyzed. However, due to the limitation of space and ability, this article does not delve into the said issue; a future task would be to address through data analysis the dilemmas and conflicts of the General Union in the two years between 1928 and its absorption into the Japanese Workers' Union in 1930.

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