An Interview with Fujii Takeshi

Interviewer: Park Min-Cheol
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About the interviewee

Fujii Takeshi is a historian who received his PhD in Modern Korean History in 2010 from Sungkyunkwan University. He served as the manager of the research team at the Institute for Korean Historical Studies in Seoul from 2013 to 2015. He has previously taught at Sungkyunkwan University and Ewha Womans University, and is currently teaching at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. His publications include *P'ashijŭm-gwa che 3 segyejuŭi sai-esŏ* [In between fascism and the third world] (Seoul: Yeoksabipyeongsa, 2012) and *Mumyŏng-ŭi maldŭl* [Unknown words] (Seoul: Podobat Publisher, 2018).

My Scholarly Probing of History, "Transformation and the Formation of the Subject," and "Nationalism"

Park I'll give you my first question. The scope of my first question is related to your scholarly probing of history. When examining the research you've conducted, it is noteworthy that you've concentrated largely on contemporary Korean history during the Japanese occupation period. You have a wide range of research topics, from the acceptance of socialism in colonial Korea to the activation of dominating ideologies and their changes as the two Koreas headed towards division after liberation from Japan. I am curious about why you began this scholarly journey and whether you had personal experiences that sparked your scholarly probing of these issues.

Fujii I'm not sure where to start to answer that question. I think the biggest cause of that journey was my experience of taking part in the student movement during my university years. I had considerable experience in the solidarity movement with ethnic Koreans in Japan, and my study in Korea was also a major factor. When I entered my master's program, I initially wanted to study the "Japanese colonial period." That's how I wanted to approach the study of Korean modern history, but after I took a year off to come and study the

language in Korea, I ended up switching my major to Korean contemporary history. Upon my arrival in Korea, I felt the basic limits of studying modern history without knowing much about contemporary history. The people who I met were all those who had experienced Korea's contemporary history, but the history I was knowledgeable about all ended at the year "1945," so there was no way I could converse with them. The wide gap I felt between me and them was a driving factor in me picking up my studies in contemporary history.

Park That being said, the spectrum—or themes—of your research into Korean contemporary history are diverse, are they not? You have researched the history of Korea embracing socialism to a study on the ideology of the Syngman Rhee (Yi Sŭngman) government and Korea's First Republic, to even your work on retranslating the writings of Japanese Marxist theorists. Of course, the topography of Korea's contemporary history is so vast as to be impossible to cover in its totality; but are there reasons why you have dealt with such a diverse range of topics in your research?

Fujii The reason why my topics of study diversified so much was probably because studying history moves in tandem with what's being researched. When you conduct historical research, there are always new things to study, and that means there's an inevitable diversification in research topics. While you could say that my topics of research are diverse, they are always linked with each other. I've continually had an interest in "major change," and in the issue of "object formation." These are all related to my experience with the student movement, where I naturally found myself deeply considering the issue of major change. Also, because I participated in the solidarity movement with Zainichi Koreans, I deeply considered the issue of subject formation within that movement. In particular, I thought a lot about how to make an "us" that can go beyond the existing framework of "Koreans," "Japanese," or "Chosun people" and "Japanese." This kind of "us" still doesn't exist. That's why the subject issue became a major interest of mine.

Park Let's move on to my second question for you. You once presented your research on the ideology of intellectuals who were involved in protecting their leaders and regimes while active in the political topography of Korea's contemporary history. Today, sixty years after these people were active members of society, people widely use the term "polifessor," which signifies the growing number of professors who actively get involved in real politics. It is significant that this term is used negatively to criticize university professors who use their positions to achieve their dreams of fame and prestige. That being said, some people argue that we can't view the political participation of professors from only a negative perspective. I wanted to ask your opinion about this.

Fujii I think there are differences in the way people approach "political participation." When we're talking about "real politics," we're talking about the politics happening in Yeouido or the Blue House, and that professors are "participating" in those kinds of political activities. I think there's a problem with that assumption. In fact, from a micro-political level, we are always participating in politics and doing politics. However, when we think just about real politics as politics happening on the macro scale or institutionalized politics, we commonly come up against the gap between stances seen in macropolitics and those seen in micropolitics. There are many so-called "progressive intellectuals" who are not involved in those kinds of politics based on what they do at home or at their school. That's why I think we need to change the perspective we have toward politics when thinking about this issue.

Park I'll now move on to my third question. An article you presented provided a glimpse of the depth of thinking you've had about nationalism. For example, you talked about the aspects of nationalism that emerged before the Cold War ideology dominated the Korean Peninsula, along with the search for a new social order. Of course, you reject the revival of nationalism. But some people think that nationalism could still play a positive role in overcoming division and unifying the two Koreas. While we clearly need to reject the

exclusionary, violent, and oppressive aspects of nationalism, some argue that protest nationalism could play a positive role given that, under colonial rule, it promoted universal human values of freedom, peace, and equality of those oppressed by colonialism. I wanted to hear your opinion about the relationship between Korean unification and nationalism.

Fujii I don't have a positive opinion about the relationship between "unification" and "nationalism." Of course, the nationalism present in South Korea has long played an important role in making visible the division. That's why I'm positive towards nationalism from that perspective, but the most important thing here is that nationalism has allowed a sort of "social distancing" between South Korea as a state and as a nation. Unlike in a normal nation-state, this was possible in a divided country where the nation and state are not the same, but it is significant that nationalism allows simultaneous separation between the state and nation. However, nationalism can completely integrate various imaginings that emerge when one moves away from the state and into the nation. That's why I view it negatively.

Moreover, there's also the problem of how to stipulate what a nation is. There's a tendency in nationalism to identify areas of homogeneity among Koryo people in Russia, Chinese Koreans (Chosŏnjok), and ethnic Koreans in Japan, like saying, "Hey everyone, we all have these commonalities." In fact, the most important thing to consider when thinking about unification is the various differences, but nationalism, I think, has a negative role to play in that it always tries to find areas of commonality. Combining unification and nationalism leads to the continuous emphasis on homogeneity and sameness, such as repeatedly saying phrases like "we are one." However, I think that if we don't move away from this kind of perception, discussions on unification could become oppressive. That's why I think that "post-division" is a more important concept than unification. In short, it's important to figure out how to overcome the various ordinary issues that emerge from division.

Ultimately, I think the important thing is the network created from continually identifying differences, whether it

be unification or nationalism.

History and Historical Consciousness

Park OK, now I'll move onto our second topic, which is history and historical consciousness. My first question is in regards to the Japanese and South Korean governments' moves to "overcome the overly negative perceptions towards one's history" and the establishment of "historical perceptions of the victor," as you note in your writings. Of course, many historians have pointed out that current history textbooks emphasize narratives regarding our independence movement, economic growth, and democratization, which suggests that historical perceptions that are overly negative toward ourselves wouldn't be accepted. Simultaneously, it is well known that those who promote the shift away from overly negative historical perceptions of our own history have the concealed motives. If we're to ignore these discussions for now, I think that a historical perception of the victor contains the meaning of a "history written from the perspective of those victors who have attained current vested rights." When viewed from the general perspective of historical studies, what are the inherent limitations of this kind of historical perspective?

Fujii The phrase "historical perspective of the victor" itself is a bit strange. Ultimately, we come back to wondering about "who was victorious," or how to define the relationship between "me" and the "victor" from a historical perspective. In fact, when studying history, there's a lot of cases where you can say that "you yourself are the real victor," can't you? Ultimately, the issue with the "historical perspective of the victor" is that it makes people think they are victors while making a show of empathy towards others. At a basic level, however, history is inevitably written by victors. People who were truly defeated do not leave behind historical records. Those types of people disappear, so ultimately all history takes the perspective of the victors. If that's the case, then the most important thing perhaps is to show in detail "who really achieved victory"

and that "victory is not something that lasts forever and can always be overturned."

Park The phrase "historical perspective of the victor" is one of several similar phrases used along with the phrase "overly negative perception of one's history." The aim of my question was to point out that South Korea's general historical perspective is that of the victor. Perhaps I feel disapproval toward the tendency to center the victory of the independence movement on Syngman Rhee, the achievements of industrialization on Park Chung-hee, and everything related to the Korean democratization movement on a few symbolic people. I've particularly felt that way while recently watching those who have long monopolized these symbols acting as New Right theorists. I'm positing the question of whether this kind of historical narrative just sucks in all these symbols without fairly treating the people who attained those victories through blood and sweat and who suffered marginalization. Perhaps I'm criticizing a reality where the right-wingers take these kinds of historical narratives and spread them under the pretext of the "historical perspective of the victor." That's why I wanted to ask you that question.

Fujii But I think that you'll have to distinguish that from the historical perspective centered on heroes. The problem with the historical perspective centered on victors is that people claim that "we already have achieved victory." They claim that we are "now" and "currently" at a point when we have achieved this victory and that, going forward, we "just need to protect this victory." But, in fact, we really need to be teaching people that "we have not yet achieved victory."

Park That's right. Just as you say, we haven't achieved victory and are instead in the process of achieving victory, so I think that while Korean contemporary history is a very interesting topic, it also needs to be approached with a keen scholarly lens. There's a lot (in Korean history) that can tempt someone. So, I think that we can come to a reasonable agreement on this. Let me now move on to the next question. My second question involves the fact that, just as you have pointed

out, interpretations of contemporary history on the Korean Peninsula have been used almost like a criterion to clearly delineate between friendly forces and enemy forces under the sphere of certain ideologies. I don't know whether it's because these influences have accumulated over decades, but when I meet young students, I find that their level of interest and understanding of Korean contemporary history is very low. This question could broaden our discussion quite a bit, but what do you think history education on the Korean Peninsula can do, and should do?

Fujii First of all, I wonder if it is really worth having "general history education." The reason why students these days don't have much interest in history is because they can't feel that history has any great significance for them. In fact, it is hard to say that having knowledge of history, knowledge alone I must say, has any real meaning. For example, if there is a certain level of education that a Korean person should have, history education doesn't have much significance. Who cares if you know what year the Imjin War occurred? Knowing that alone doesn't carry much significance. The important thing is that knowledge of history can change the perceptions that I have about the world in which I'm living in, and without that kind of experience, I think it's only natural for young students not to have interest in history.

When one realizes that they are in an oppressive situation and need to escape, it is only then that they find meaning in history based on the conditions that they are given. If not, history becomes just another piece of "information." However, usually when schools teach history, they start with the Stone Age, the Neolithic Era, Bronze Era, and so on, right? The way history is taught makes it almost completely irrelevant to one's own current situation and becomes just another piece of information that needs to be memorized, like some mathematical equation. That makes it hard for students to get interested in it. I think that history education should start with present times. For example, even if you start with the question of "how did this desk here get made and how did it get here," it can make you think about a ton of things, from where the wood came from, to who cut the wood, where

the metal that was used to cut the wood came from, and so on. Asking those types of questions allows you to understand that you're living in a massive network. I think that history education can help students obtain this kind of scholarly lens to look at things.

Park So, we could interpret things this way, perhaps? While it's hard to generalize, what we need right now is a kind of lens to view things, and you're saying that this lens should start with "now" or "from this place." To complement to what you're saying, what we need is a way to draw out the past and present based on the potential and conditions of the lives we've been given and, if we can't do that, we'll inevitably have zero interest in history?

Fujii Young students believe that the present is unchangeable, which is why they don't have interest in history, in my opinion. In contrast, if the present is a changeable thing, and that the life I'm living in the present is something that was made through historical processes, I'd probably get interested in those processes, wouldn't I? That would be true, of course, if I wanted to escape my present. In some ways, history is like a restraint that we need to escape from, isn't it? And we'd need to know what the target is to escape from those fetters. I think that the focus of history education is getting people to understand history without waxing poetic about the present, but rather to criticize the present and have a desire to escape it. If we simply wax poetic about the present and remain complacent, there's no need for history education. That's why the only thing that people like that need is the historical perspective of the victor. "We've already achieved victory. We can just remain like this going forward."

Park As you just said, I think that a fascist perspective on history can reemerge at any time given the decline of democratic politics. In a column you wrote for *The Hankyoreh* a year ago, you pointed out that the Park Geun-hye and Shinzo Abe administrations "already share the view that 'embarrassing history' should not be taught, whether it's about invasions or dictatorship, in order to plant the seeds of 'patriotism' that has

no substance."[1] After reading your column, I felt like perhaps Korea, China, and Japan pretend to be confrontational with each other under the influence of the US, but they share the same perspective of history that "embarrassing history" should be rejected, and that this kind of historical perspective is ultimately the basis for the continued tensions between East Asian countries. From this viewpoint, what do you think a historical perspective that can contribute to peace in East Asia should be?

Fujii From one perspective, I think the key question is, "What is peace in East Asia?" In short, we need to ask the real question of whether peace exists in East Asia. In fact, while East Asia might seem peaceful to some people, others think it's no more than a battlefield, right? There are actually a lot of people who are dying as we speak. That's why we need a historical perspective that allows us to see this.

From another perspective, I think it's important to ask the question, "Are tense relations a bad thing?" It is common to talk about reconciliation, but we need to think about why we need to reconcile with one another. In short, we need to closely examine the issue of whether a relationship of tension or confrontation must really be reconciled. In fact, tense relationships will exist no matter what, and a society that has tense relationships is one that is dynamic, isn't it? So, from that perspective, I don't think that tense relationships in East Asia are necessarily a bad thing.

In fact, the key question is what kind of structure a tense relationship exists in. That's why I don't think that talking about peace in ambiguous and ideological ways is a great thing. What in the world is peace? I don't think it is the image of doves flying around and children running around and playing with smiles on their faces. I think that we need to change the concept of peace to include circumstances where people and countries can coexist with each other despite confrontational relationships. When you hear the word "peace," it usually feels humanistic or something like that, right? I don't like that. The concept of peace here is more

[1] This question was written in November 2016, but the actual interview was held on December 20, 2016.

about how we create a relationship where we don't kill each other even though we could, and I don't think that a situation where everyone completely disarms so that they can't kill one another constitutes peace. That's because people will kill each other anytime once the conditions change. We need to first assume that people will be hostile to one another and that they'll kill one another and consider what we need to do to ensure that they don't do those things and can co-exist with one another. History, for its part, should show us that we humans have long lived amid ceaseless conflict, and remind us of the clear fact that people have also ceaselessly tried to resolve that conflict. It's easy to present a kind of utopia when talking about peace, but I think what we really need is to think about the specific and diverse techniques we need to coexist.

Eliminating the Pressure to Be the Same through "Nation-building" and Democracy

Park I'll now move on to another question for you. I'm going to quote something you wrote that deeply impressed me. "The Korean War paved the way for May 16, and the nation (*kungmin*) walked down that path. In order to have found a different path, we would need to return to the point when the nation was created. May 16 will always exist together with the nation unless we resolve the violence imprinted in the nation."[2] I know that you have long conducted research on the eight years after liberation from Japan, the point in time when the nation was created. If you've come to a tentative conclusion based on your research about this, could you briefly provide an explanation about it? I'd also like you to talk about whether the creation of "half" a nation under the division system has been "completed" or is "presently ongoing," and what kind of damage that has caused.

[2] Fujii Takeshi, "'Toraon kungmin': chedae kunindŭl-ŭi chŏnhu" [The return of the nation: the period of the discharged soldiers], *Yŏksa yŏn'gu* [Historical Studies], vol. 14 (2004): 295.

Fujii It's difficult for me to figure out what to say in response to that question. First of all, we're talking about "nation building" here, aren't we? Essentially, it's the creation of a sense of belonging to the nation or some kind of community, but in Korea's case, the people (*minjok*) and nation (*kungmin*) aren't the same, so it's a bit of a special situation. That's why I think my research topics were attempting to show how that uniqueness has manifested itself historically. More accurately, I focused on identifying the things that emerged in the gap created by the differences in the people and nation.

That being said, the first thing we need to consider when thinking about nation building is that it emerged from a response to a crisis. I dealt with this a lot in the introduction to my book, *P'ashijŭm-gwa che 3 segyejuŭi sai-esŏ* [In between fascism and the third world], but nation building existed as a kind of "strategy to win people over." Globally, that has led to fascism, and welfare states. In response to the crisis presented by the intensified class struggle that came about following the emergence of the Soviet Union and the Great Depression, the "nation" was offered as a way to win over combative main agents that emerged in the form of class. Particularly after the Second World War, when the welfare state model gained traction, the main strategy was to turn producers with class-based characteristics into civil or national consumers. The important thing at this point in time, however, was that the welfare state strategy had already collapsed. Broadly speaking, following the 1968 Revolution, the capitalist-nation strategy transformed into neo-liberalism. And, in fact, it is important to point out that the welfare state system was only possible under the foundations provided by Fordism. Given that Fordism had already had its day, it was inevitable that welfare states would also lose their effectiveness.
If we make a bit of an extreme contrast here, the welfare state's basic strategy was to win people over, while the neo-liberal strategy was to exclude them. In the industrial capitalist stage, there was a need to cultivate and actively win over outstanding laborers in order to increase productivity, but with financialization, the attitude toward labor completely changed as the methods used to increase capital shifted away from exploitation of surplus labor. With the decrease in

the status of this strategy of winning laborers over, nation-building came to look like it was no longer an important strategy. I dealt with the period in which nation-building was important, but I'd like to point out that the period was different contextually compared to now.

Park Understood. So, it may be different contextually, but when we talk about unification, whether that's a confederation or union, it could refer to the process of creating yet another nation-state on the Korean Peninsula, right? And there would be the need for nation-building suitable for that kind of period. There's also the possibility that the word "nation" used at this time was not an exclusionary border or old identity that needed to be rejected, but rather something complementary to global universal ideologies. In short, are you saying that nation-building isn't important in the process of the unification of the Korean Peninsula?

Fujii Is there a reason to form a nation-state?

Park If not, what other options are there?

Fujii When we talk about nation-building, ultimately we are focusing on obtaining some kind of homogeneity, aren't we? I have doubts about whether we should approach the issue that way. Of course, when considering institutional welfare or similar things, we naturally need to obtain some kind of homogeneity. However, you said you were thinking about "unification as a process." In that case, there is even more reason not to embark on a nation-building project, isn't there? Ultimately, the "nation" you talk about is just a kind of norm, you see? That's why we need to move away from the constraints of homogeneity, and why we need to completely shift our thinking about the question of how to create a nation.

Park Understood. Now, I will move on to my third question. You have said, "Telling someone that you are taking them to court signals the end of dialogue, but, in contrast, politics that is removed from the confines of the law signals the

start of strained dialogue. This is where democracy starts." Your clear and simple remarks have become a wide topic of conversation through social media. You have also said that one of the reasons why the 1987 system failed to prevent the return to dictatorship was due to the failure to change the everyday authoritarianism that is deeply rooted in our lives and culture. This remark is only more painful to hear given that 30 or so years have passed since that time. I'd like to hear more in detail about your argument for the need to move from the issue of democracy to more micro-level spheres, so I wanted to first ask you about what kind of ideological or theoretical influences or personal life experiences you've had.

Fujii When I think back to my time at university, the influence of fascism had a major impact on my thinking in this area. That was 1991, and there was a magazine called *Imp'eksyŏn* [Impaction].

Park Was that a magazine published in Japan?

Fujii Yes. The magazine had a special feature article in 1991 called "Umŏn libŭ 20 nyŏn" [The 20 years of the women's liberation movement]. It was referring to the women's liberation movement that spread nationally in 197071, and there was a lot that I learned from that article. The women's liberation movement at that time dealt significantly with issues of daily life, as did the feminism movement in general. That's how I got interested in thinking about my own daily life and physical being. It was in that way that I started thinking about authority at the micro-level in daily life, and that's what was so good about the Japanese student movement. The Korean student movement was inherently very authoritarian, wasn't it? There was an absolute hierarchy among juniors and seniors, for example. The Japanese movement wasn't like that at all, however. That was the legacy of the All-Campus Joint Struggle Committees (Zenkyoto), which took issue with authoritarianism itself. At the time, whenever I met someone who looked around my age, I always dispensed with honorific forms of speech.

I served as head of the college student committee, and

whenever we conducted group negotiations with professors, we sat the dean and other appointed professors in front of us and pointed our fingers at them saying, "Hey, you!" So, it was significant for me that I was involved in a student movement that was devoid of the atmosphere of authoritarianism. In terms of ideological or theoretical influence, I think Foucault's impact was significant. But some people understand Foucault to support the "omnipotence of authority," right? There are a lot of people who think Foucault argues that we can't get away from authority, but I understood his argument to be just the opposite due to my own experiences; namely, that we can fight anywhere. In fact, Foucault says that authority cannot be absolute and that we can protest it anywhere.

The Conditions of Existence, and the Significance of a "Sense of Tension" as a Guide for Life and Scholarly Research

Park I think we can say that you like the word "tension." My next question is related to that. If I were to make a bit of an extreme comparison, perceptions toward the Korean diaspora can be divided into that which employs a "nationalistic frame," which connects negative symbols and tragic expressions with their history and, on the other hand, that which employs a "post-nationalistic frame," which simply melds their experiences into general theory about diasporas that serves to affirm them as creative behaviors. From that perspective, I think that the phrase you use, "a sense of tension," is extraordinarily significant. In one article you wrote, you quoted Cho Gyŏng-hŭi when you said that when you meet with members of the Korean diaspora (particularly the Zainichi Koreans), you feel a sense of tension that awakens you to the history of division and conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Could you provide us with a little more detailed explanation about your use of the phrase "a sense of tension"?

Fujii First, I'm really happy to get an opportunity to answer this

question. My favorite article is, in fact, “Natsŏn kwihwan” [Unfamiliar return home]. Thank you for mentioning it.

Park (Laughs) It’s lucky for us that we mentioned it.

Fujii I pressured all of my friends into helping me work on that article. (laughs) It’s my favorite article. The “sense of tension” that I mentioned there was related to the “daily life” that I’ve continued to bring up. It’s the sense of tension you feel when faced with a particular issue, when you realize the position you are in, or when you feel something physically. You feel a sense of tension when you try to put something in motion, right? You don’t feel a sense of tension when you are complaining about something in ambiguous terms or demand something from someone. In those cases, it’s not you who is doing anything. A sense of tension emerges when you do something yourself or try to put something into motion directly. You get tense when you try to do something yourself, even if it’s trivial. You need courage when you suddenly express opposition to something. I continue mentioning the phrase “a sense of tension” because I wanted to talk about what starts at that point. I wrote a column a long time ago about “not adhering to traffic lights,” and what I said then is relevant now. You get nervous when you violate traffic signals. That’s because it can be dangerous.

Park Overall, what was the context of the column?

Fujii I wrote it quoting remarks by James Scott, who talked about breaking trivial rules as part of political training. He was saying that repeatedly doing those kinds of things on a regular basis is important.

Park So, you are saying that a sense of tension is the escape from the framework of the everyday and braving disobedience?

Fujii Yes, a sense of tension emerges when you do those types of things. Feeling a sense of tension is the first step toward a different existence for yourself. In fact, you feel a sense of tension when you try to escape from the position you were

given. My remark in the column that a sense of tension emerges from my meetings with Zainichi Koreans was a comment on feeling a sense of tension that allowed me to realize my own historical existence. I wanted to focus on that. What's important here is ultimately the question of putting something into action. That's because the most important thing is to try to put something into action from the position you yourself are currently in.

Park However, you're a historian and as I read what you've written, I've discovered a significant number of places where you've quoted books written by Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. Even in our research institute, we've borrowed from Deleuze's philosophy on "differences" and "creation," along with Spinoza's "transformation," as part of our focus on the innovative creation formed by tension. Some very simple examples would be that the differences between Koreans living in Korea and Koreans of the diaspora, the differences between members of different Korean diasporas, and differences between South Korea and North Korea act as positive mechanisms that bring forth new kinds of creation. However, up until now, most discourse on Korean unification has been focused on "overcoming differences" and "recovering homogeneity." I want to hear your opinions on this.

Fujii I like Deleuze because he broke the framework of "dialectics," and showed there's reason that exists that is totally removed from dialectic reasoning. Dialectics is ultimately about integration, is it not? But he showed that there's absolutely no reason for things to be that way. When you think dialectically, there are no grounds for uniqueness or independence; there's just a negative machine for integration. However, Deleuze didn't think that way at all, so that's why I like him. The questions that come to mind are: "Ultimately, can different things coexist together? And how can we invent and create techniques to coexist together?"

Audre Lorde is a black feminist and poet. In regards to "differences," she talks about differences being our strong point but also our weak point, perhaps because she's black, a woman, and felt many things while active in the United

States. She says that differences do not erect roadblocks to each other; rather, they serve as bridges and that we need to learn how to use them. We still don't know how to use those differences, and she's suggesting that we consider how to learn about our differences. Instead of continuously trying to identify areas of similarity, I think we need to change our way of thinking to allow us to communicate based on our differences. That's the only way we can seriously consider techniques to use heterogeneity. In fact, democracy is, in short, a story about techne, isn't it? It's a question of how people gather and make decisions, and that technique is the central tenet of democracy. For example, how we conduct a "meeting" as democratically as possible is a question that we can consider in daily life. I think considering that kind of question is the most important thing to do. In some ways, unification is also that kind of thing, isn't it? Instead of ridding ourselves of what's different and integrating dialectically, we need to consider how best to revive those differences and invent a new kind of technique.

Park So, you're saying that we need to ceaselessly uncover mechanisms and systems that allow us to communicate and co-exist with differences. It could also mean something else. You are a Japanese intellectual active in South Korea. Do you feel like you yourself are different in this society? Or, to put it another way, do you feel a sense of tension?

Fujii I think that we need to lift the veil on those differences as much as possible. That's why I think of myself as a foreigner, not a Japanese person. I'm trying to think that way, but usually I don't make that distinction in daily life. For example, when I do a lecture on history at a school, I talk about Korean history as "our history." (laughs)

Park I think that if South Korean society doesn't come to its senses, it will be unable to feel a sense of tension. You become completely assimilated to it at some point. In fact, that's what's comfortable. You forget things that cause issues. Perhaps we just cover these issues up as best we can. But if we're intent in feeling a sense of tension, we must make efforts to feel tense,

and actual efforts are needed in order for us to use differences to form relationships. You've worked in South Korea for around 16 years, and I wanted to ask that question because I was curious whether you'd had any realizations or reflections on it from time to time.

Fujii I don't believe a sense of tension derives from being a foreigner or a Korean. Differences that emerge in daily life come from trivial power relationships, so I think it's a different thing to say that one can feel something because they are a foreigner. Even Koreans can feel a sense of tension within Korea. Social issues can't be divided based on nationality, can they? In fact, we all are different, and we just pretend to be the same.

Park Thank you for taking the time to answer this long interview. Let's end it here.