

2019 Orientation Lecture given at a reception of ICU students' arrival

During World War II, around 40,000 people from China and prisoners of Allied Power were forcibly taken to sites across Japan, such as coal mines and construction sites of aerodromes and dams; they were coerced to perform labors in poor living conditions, and many lost their lives as a result. In the orientation for ICY students two years ago, I talked about how this tragic history had also happened at the construction site of the Hiraoka Dam in the Tenryu Village.

Last year, I talked about the tragic stories of Japanese families who immigrated to a place in Northern China called Manchuria as agricultural settlers during WWII. When the war was coming to an end, Soviet soldiers invaded their colony and angry local farmers whose lands were forcibly occupied by the Japanese settlers rose in a revolt. While the families attempted to escape with their children, some failed and committed mass suicide, and some left their children behind with a faint hope that they might be adopted by local farmers.

This time, I will talk about the construction of the Iida Line. It has a total length of 196km, and connects Tatsuno and Toyohashi through Iida, Tenryu Gorge (Tenryukyo), and Hiraoka.

Then how did people manage transportation in this region before the Iida Line was built?

Fortunately, the Tenryu River flows in this region. People and goods can be transported from upriver and to downriver following the waterflow. This will be a one-way transportation, so how should we transport goods from downriver or to upriver? I will talk about this later.

If boats are used for transport, it is said that the stream gradient should be 1/440 meters at maximum when a boat is floating along the river's flow. The Tenryu River has a gradient of 1/280 meters, a raging

stream that is unfit for transportation by boats. Now there is a dam, so you cannot tell the stream was rapid. However, deaths of crew members were not uncommon due to its rapidness.

Transporting large amounts of timber with a method called “timber rafting” is especially dangerous. An elder once said “In the 31 years of timber rafting I have done, 30 people lost their lives.”

Timber rafting is a method transporting timber of four to five meters in length by tying them with vines; two raftsmen at both ends of the rafts float it down using poles and transport timber to the destination downstream.

A raft weighs around four tons, and two rafts were tied up during transportation. Automobiles today need to deal with expenses like fuel, depreciation, and worn out tires, but rafts require none of this. The transportation only needed two raftsmen, which is extremely economical.

Boats were used to transport people and goods. The size of a boat varies in different eras, but it usually had a capacity of around four tons. Two crews were at each end of the boat, and they transported goods to their destination following the river flow.

The speed of a boat travelling downstream depends on the location and the volume of the river, but the average speed from the place of departure to the destination was around 10 kilometer per hour.

Raftsmen would hand over the raft to the goods owners at their destination, and they would return along mountain paths by foot. If we calculate their speed based on what the elder said, they supposedly walked along these steep paths of the mountain at a speed of faster than 24 kilometers per hour.

It begs the question, how did people return the boats?

There were two crews at each end of a boat, in which there were four people in total. The crew had a significant mission to safely transport passengers and goods to the destination. They floated down the river using poles proficiently to prevent the boat from running aground or hitting rocks on the shore. Arriving at their destination, the crew would unload cargo and load goods that would be delivered upriver. The goods included salt, sugar, fish, cotton, and petroleum. Each boat had three ropes of 30 to 50 meters in length attached. Three crew members would pull the boat ashore by holding a rope each, and the remaining one would use a pole to prevent it from crashing into shore. Unlike ropes today, the ropes used to pull boats ashore were not made of nylon. The ropes were used in a careful manner since they become heavier and lose their strength when they get wet.

The boat owner would navigate the boat with a pole and crews hired by him would pull the ropes. It is said that a boat going upstream took 10 days to come back, going through 110 kilometers. Of course, it took a longer time when the streamflow rose after rainfall.

At the beginning of the spring, since seasonal winds would blow toward the upper stream, the crews also used the wind power by setting sails.

In the later half of the 1800s, the development of Japanese industries promoted greater circulation of goods and people. However, with an undeveloped automobile industry, road infrastructure was inadequate, and thus people had a high expectation of railways that can transport a massive number of goods and people at once.

It also impacted the Iida Line we have now. Capitalists with various interests had extended the railway. The line had been extended north from Toyohashi on South and extended south from Tatsuno on North. However, its construction operating from North and South both ceased at the Tenryu Gorge and Mikawa-kawai respectively, resulting in an undeveloped section of 67 kilometers between Tenryu Gorge and

Mikawa-kawai which included the Tenryu Village. There are several factors that caused the issue, but the biggest reason was the area's precipitous terrain and unconsolidated rock bed combined with the raging Tenryu River beneath. Who would risk their lives and take measures of such a dangerous place?

They asked many surveyors for help but all of them were hesitant to take the request. Then a high executive of the railway company said, "There is a skilled surveyor from a railway company of Hokkaido, who is also the chief of the Ainu community. I heard that he is a brave technician who can complete his tasks no matter how dangerous the place is. We may ask him for help."

Thus, they asked Kaneto Kawamura, the chief of the Ainu community, to take measurements.

Here, I want to talk a little about the people of Ainu. Japan consists mainly of three ethnic groups (although this categorization is debatable), which are the Ryukyuan, the Yamato, and the Ainu. The Ryukyuan and Ainu people are native to Ryukyu islands and Hokkaido area respectively, and the Yamato people have been distributed across the rest of Japan. Although they fade away now, each had their own unique culture and language. You can do some research to learn more details.

Right now, I hope you will listen to my speech with a knowledge that many Yamato people tended to look down on the Ainu people during that time (a type of ethnic discrimination).

The Ainu man, Mr. Kaneto Kawamura, came to this area with nine other people, including his family and the survey team, in response to the job request and the recognition given to his talent from a place that is hundreds of kilometers away.

They held their breath at the precipitous cliff that was beyond their imagination. The team strapped the surveying equipment on their body and made measurements while climbing up and down the trackless cliff. There were times they nearly slipped or tripped by tree roots and fell. The team proceeded their task under these conditions.

Other than the precipitousness of the location, the team said there were other baffling factors: they were injured and their equipment was broken by boars that appeared out of nowhere, they were put in danger because of bears, and they ran away from bee attacks. The team struggled most with a type of venomous snake, mamushi. They spent tremendous energy fighting with these snakes during the end of summer and fall when they are active.

If there was a private house around, the surveying team would ask to be accommodated in the house, and necessities such as food were transported by boat. However, sometimes they ran out of food, such as when the boats could not return for several days due to rising streamflow after a long rainfall. In these instances, they went over mountains to distant towns to buy food.

Also, the surveyors and their families had to bear the curious stares and discriminatory words from locals who were seeing the Ainu people for the first time.

Kaneto and his surveying team came to this area in April, 1926, and they completed measurements after two years and several months.

The local people worked together with Kaneto and were cooperative. However, rowdy migrant workers on the construction site who had come from all over the country, harassed Kaneto in a discriminatory way after knowing he was the director. They pestered him while drinking and made fun of him audibly; he would overhear things like “oh, how come that Ainu is our director?”

The worldwide economic depression beginning in 1929 also caused an increased amount of unemployment in Japan, and it was an era when jobless men seeking employment all over Japan entered the field of railway construction. A number of rowdy and dissolute men were among them.

Then the excavation of the Tenryu Gorge tunnel, which was an extremely challenging construction, began. When they made a progress of 20 more meters after a month, a lot of water spouted from the ceiling. Kaneto directed the site to perform a temporary measure by using drainage pumps. Thereupon, the dissolute men complained audibly, questioning why he couldn't know in advance that this problem would happen. Kaneto tried to find a solution, while tolerating their hostility.

After consulting with Mr. Kimoto, they decided to caulk the water-leaking spot using concrete. When they finished preparation and were ready to pour the concrete, the rowdy men suddenly hit Kaneto with logs. While losing his consciousness, he heard them say "you Ainu brat, who do you think you are? There is no way we get ordered around by you," "yeah, let's bury him. Nobody will know if we cover the pit with concrete." They dragged him and threw him into a pit.

Kaneto gradually came back to consciousness, but he was already buried and stuck in earth and sand. As of the men standing above the pit were ready to pour the concrete, they hesitated as they started to be afraid of the fact that they were going to murder a person, which is a serious crime. Then, Kaneto began to talk to them.

"Hey listen, I will die here if you pour the concrete. I'm not scared of death. I have shown mettle as a surveyor both in Hokkaido and here, laid my life on the line, and lived my life taking pride in my job. So I could die anytime and I wouldn't mind. If you want to kill me, do it. But just so you know, you can kill me but will never kill my Ainu spirit. For those of you who despise Ainu people, how much did you live your life? Who leads a life half-heartedly like you is not truly alive. To live, is to take pride in his job. If you kill me, you can't cover up your crime. You can't get away with this. Hey, let's continue working on the tunnel with pride. Or if you would be proud of killing an Ainu man, then just cast the concrete at me now."

While his life was under threat, Kaneto spoke to these men calmly. They were overwhelmed by him and could only stand transfixed.

After this incident, everyone held respect for Kaneto and his attitude towards his job. Then people worked together to complete the construction.

Mr. Kaneto, the chief of the Ainu community, came to an unfamiliar place far away from Hokkaido, performed measurements on a precipitous site while dealing with dangerous animals, experienced discrimination, and even had his life endangered because of the hate. While overcoming these hardships, he participated in the construction as an on-site director. In this way, he is **most definitely** a benefactor of the Iida Line.

23 years later after the opening of Iida Line, people who did research and know the great achievement of Mr. Kaneto invited him and his family to this area, in order to express their gratitude one more time. He was very much welcomed in all the areas along the line, and the speeches he gave were enthusiastically received. Mr. Kaneto and his family said “our hardships of that time were fully rewarded” and went back to Hokkaido with satisfaction.

Mr. Kaneto departed this life at the age of 83 in 1977.

Regarding the Opening of Iida Line No.2

I will talk about this if there is time left.

A great number of Korean workers were involved in the construction of the Iida Line.

Prior to the “Japanese Annexation of Korea” in 1910, quite a few of Korean workers came to Japan and worked at the construction sites of mines, railways, and hydroelectric generation plants across Japan.

The “Japanese Annexation of Korea” is a Japanese measure to colonize the Korean peninsula. Then Japan commenced a comprehensive land survey of Korea, which is called the “Land Survey Operation.”

Back then, Korean people had claimed ownership of their land by stating that their family had cultivated the place since the generations of their parents, grandparents, and even ancestors.

Therefore, even when they did not file registration of land ownership to public institutions like government offices, people acknowledged each other’s property and lived without having huge conflict.

When the Japanese government occupied Korea, although they recognized the land ownership of people who made registration in government offices, people’s ownership was not acknowledged when they simply stated that they had been using the land for generations. This kind of land was claimed as state property, and the government started to levy an expensive land use fee on people living there who had operated farms and built houses. As a result, many Korean farmers could not afford their living expenses anymore and came to Japan seeking employment to earn income and send money back home.

Korean workers used a tool called kichi (similar to beam balance) to transport materials to higher ground, and as such, it was said that they were more capable than the Japanese as laborers. There were thousands of workers like that working at the construction site of Iida Line. Among them, there were people who got appointed as the on-site director and people who invited their family from Korea and established their own construction company later.

During that time in Japan, it was often that Korean people were discriminated against. Since they were paid less than Japanese workers even when they were doing the same job, employers benefited from these Korean workers. However, sometimes they protested against the extremely low wage and late payment through collective negotiation and strikes.

There were many Korean people living in this Hiraoka region. Interestingly, although discrimination still did exist, there was almost no discrimination in Hiraoka. Back then, 10%-20% of the students in the Hiraoka Middle School were Korean, and the teacher who transferred to the school said, “it is absolutely wonderful that there is no discrimination between students. However, I’m worried about them when they graduate and go out into the world and confront reality.”

I mentioned this when I was talking about the story of Mr. Kaneto and his surveying team of the Iida Line, but why do people discriminate? Why do people discriminate even against those who are better than them? This is peculiar as if we think from the perspective of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, to discriminate against the others means that you are also discriminated against.

The End