
EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN KOREA AND JAPAN FOR AWARENESS OF THE OTTER

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The otter is a symbolic animal of wetland habitats including both rivers and coasts. In Korea the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*) still maintains nationwide distribution except for metropolitan areas, but the survival is endangered at almost all areas of present distribution by illegal activities and degradation of water quality and habitats by such causes as reclamation and river works. Since it is not realistic to establish wide sanctuaries for the species, creation of habitat conditions in which the otter and people can coexist is the only way of otter conservation. Increasing awareness of people is the first step for such efforts.

During these five years Korea has achieved remarkable success in otter awareness. Major reasons of such remarkable change are attributed to the following points: 1) TV media effectively introduced endangered situation of Korean otters and environmental degradation, 2) triggered by TV programs, newspapers, NGOs and governmental bodies started to take respective actions, 3) advancement of otter survey made it possible to dispatch accurate status that otters were endangered but that have nationwide distribution, 4) international cooperation between Korea and Japan was among driving forces for conservational efforts and extinction history of the Japanese otter became a lesson for Korea. Chronology of international cooperation between Japan and Korea for otter research and awareness activities are summarized in Table 1. History of international cooperation between Japan and Korea in otter research and awareness can be summarized as follows:

Initiation period (1980s):

Small-scale otter survey in Korea was initiated mainly by the initiative of Japanese researchers, but it was sporadic.

Table 1. Chronology of international cooperation between Japan and Korea for otter research and awareness.

1982	Ando, Shiraishi and Son investigated otter distribution in southern part of Korea. Asahi <i>et. al.</i> investigated otter feces along Seom-Jin River
1991	Ando and Sasaki in collaboration with Kyungnam University resumed otter distribution survey at southern and eastern coasts of Korea .
1992	Ando in collaboration with Kyungnam University surveyed otter distribution survey at western coasts of Korea.
1993	Both media in Japan and Korea were interested in the research.
1994	Researchers organized the Otter Research Group Japan, and got funding from the Japan Fund for global Environment. Emphasis of field research was laid on rivers of Koje Island.
1995	Two otter symposia were convened simultaneously at Kochi in Japan and Masan in Korea. Research emphasis was laid on a reservoir at Koje Island.
1996	Research emphasis was laid on Yoncho reservoir at Koje Island. Lecture of a Japanese researcher at Kyung-sung University in Busan.
1997	Telemetric study at east coast. First Ph.D thesis in Korea on ecological survey of the otter.
1998	Joint presentation on research results at international conferences.
1999	Establishment of an otter conservation association in Korea.
2000	Lecture of Korean researchers at “Otter forum in Susaki 2000” in Japan First M.Sc thesis on the otter at Kyungnam University.
2001	Visit of Susaki City delegation at Korea for exchange through the otter. Visit of Korean researcher at Susaki city for conservational advice.
2002	Translation of otter awareness material into Korean. Students of Tokyo University of Agriculture visit Korea for senior thesis on Korean otter.

Preliminary survey period (1990-1994):

Distributional study was resumed by Japanese researchers by cooperation of Korean university students. it was made by personal capacity of researchers, and awareness was not main-stram of activities. During the period, however, the number of collaborative students gradually increased and some media were interested in the activities.

Popularization period (1995-1999):

Researchers involved in foregoing activities organized “Otter Research Group Japan”, and successfully got fund from the Japan Fund for Global Environment, a fund related to the Japanese Environment Agency. The major activities shifted from research to awareness as exemplified by the convening of “Korea-Japan Otter Symposium” both in Korea and Japan. In 1997 Dr. Han was granted Ph.D through ecological study of Korean otters, and it was the first occasion that Ph.D was granted to the field study of a Korean mammal species. In the latter half of the period, popularity of the otter among Korean people increased surprisingly. The otter boom was initiated by a TV program in 1997 that recorded audience rate of 27 %. Detonated by the broadcasting media, newspaper and NGOs also started to pay special attention. Korean government bodies also allocated fund for ecological survey of otters.

Mutual and multilateral cooperation period (2000 and after):

Visit of researchers , NGO people and students between two countries became more frequent. Korean researchers started to give impact on conservation activities in Japan through lectures and advising activities elsewhere in Japan. At the same time participation of both Korean and Japanese researchers and conservationists in international conferences is becoming more frequent. In the case of the otter, it is realized through joint awareness activities with IUCN/Species Survival Commission Otter Specialist Group.

In view of the above, it is important to note that there existed research period over several years before the outbreak of awareness that was triggered by TV programmes. During the preliminary period, knowledge on the otter gradually accumulated and the interest of media people on the species was also fostered.

Research and conservation cooperation between Korea and Japan has seen steady advancement in other mammal species such as the black bear. After two years preparation, the Ibaraki Nature Museum in Japan is now holding its 3-month Exhibition entitled “Natural History of Korea - Connecting the Asian Continent and Japan.” It is the first exhibition in Japan aiming at introduction of Korean nature. Various cases of Korea-Japan cooperation have been introduced in the exhibition. Media also shows some attention to such activities as seen in the case of “Japan-Korea International Environmental Award” that is jointly sponsored by the Mainichi in Japan and the Chosun-ilbo in Korea (Fig. 1).

第8回 日韓国際環境賞

第8回の国際環境賞の表彰式は、4月29日午後5時、東京都千代田区千代田の日本国際環境センターで開かれ、韓国政府代表団と日本代表団が出席した。...

暖化防止、黄砂対策など急ピッチ 国含め3カ国協力

日本、韓国、中国の3カ国が、気候変動防止と黄砂対策を急ピッチで進めようとする。...



カワウソに超音波を取り付ける 日韓共同の動物学研究会

日本の失敗、韓国で繰り返さぬよ

韓国は環境問題を北極圏に繋がる活動を行うことで、高緯度地域アジア全体の協力的な取り組みを進めようとしている。...



カワウソ保護へ 共同研究が成果

韓国と日本の共同研究が、カワウソの保護に成果を挙げた。...

日韓(韓国)環境賞授賞式の同時夜形式は、05年10月、韓国で行われた第1回授賞式を皮切りに、毎年日本と韓国で交互に開かれていく。8回目は今秋、韓国で予定。

Fig. 1. Newspaper article introducing Korea/Japan cooperation in otter conservation.