

Local court rules Buddhist statue belongs to South Korea, not Japan

- 1) DAEJEON, South Korea--The South Korean government has been ordered to hand over a centuries-old Buddhist statue, the object of a long-running tussle with Japan, to a South Korean temple in a local court ruling here.
- 2) The Daejeon District Court ruled in favor of Buseoksa temple on Jan. 26, deeming it the statue's rightful owner in a decision that could further complicate the difficult relationship between Japan and South Korea.
- 3) In Tokyo, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said, "The ruling is extremely regrettable. We will ask the South Korean government for appropriate measures so the statue can be returned to Japan expediently."
- 4) The artifact in question, the seated statue of the Kanzeon Bodhisattva, has a twisted and mysterious past.
- 5) It became the center of a diplomatic controversy between Japan and South Korea after it was stolen in 2012 from Kannonji temple in Tsushima, Nagasaki Prefecture, by South Korean burglars. The statue is a designated tangible cultural property of Nagasaki Prefecture.
- 6) Those thieves were apprehended in 2013, and the statue was confiscated by the South Korean government. Kannonji temple and the Japanese government then requested the statue's return.
- 7) But Buseoksa temple in Seosan, a city on the Korean Peninsula's western coast, submitted a request to the Daejeon District Court, asking that the South Korean government turn over the statue because it was the rightful owner. The temple claimed Japanese thieves had stolen it in the 14th century.
- 8) The key question in the latest case was whether the statue was stolen by Japanese "wako" pirates. Wako is a name given to groups of Japanese pirates, who were active along the Chinese and Korean coasts around the 13th to 16th centuries.
- 9) Experts were called in to evaluate the statue and provide other testimonies.
- 10) The district court ruled that there was sufficient evidence to surmise that the statue had once belonged to Buseoksa temple. It added that the statue was transferred to Kannonji temple in Tsushima through "a process that was not ordinary."
- 11) The court concluded that the South Korean government had an obligation to hand over the statue to Buseoksa temple.
- 12) Before the statue became the subject of the court case, the South Korean government conducted its own investigation in 2014 using experts to determine how the statue came to Japan. While the government said there was a high probability it was stolen by wako, it did not reach a definitive conclusion.【2017-01-26 | The Asahi Shimbun】



The seated statue of the Kanzeon Bodhisattva that was stolen from Kannonji temple in Tsushima, Nagasaki Prefecture (Provided by the Nagasaki prefectural board of education)

- 1) tussle 乱闘、もめごと
- 2) rightful 正当な権利を持った、合法的な
- 3) expediently 適切に、情勢に応じて
- 4) artifact 人工物
- The seated statue of the Kanzeon Bodhisattva 観世音菩薩坐像
- 5) tangible cultural property 有形文化財
- 6) apprehend 逮捕する
- confiscate 没収する
- 10) surmise 推測する

☆Ice breaker for active discussion

1. What is your opinion about the court ruling mentioned in the article?
2. What do you think about the relationship of Japan and South Korea recently?
3. Have you ever been to South Korea and how was your experience?
4. What are the similarities and differences of Japanese people and South Korean people?
5. Make sentences using the following words: tussle, artifact, tangible, confiscate and surmise.