

7th Column (2017. 4. 15)

「Australia day」

Ha The month of January has quickly passed and I have been told that the beautiful cherry blossom season is fast approaching. Perhaps because I am still spending my days sneaking the tiny heating pads into all my clothes every morning, this imagery of the blossoms have not really sunk in. Meanwhile in Australia, my friends tell me the weather continues to be hot, and Australia day (January 26) was a perfect day for some ice cold beers. Australia day is our first national holiday after the new years in Australia.

January 26th is the day when the ships from England landed in Australia, in the year 1788. This marked the beginning of Australia as England's penal colony, which shaped Australia as we know it today. Australia day is a day we celebrate the country of Australia with everyone who lives there. Typically, friends and families would gather for a relaxing day of BBQs, drinks, and attend the local events that have been organised for some fun.

However it is important to point out that for the Aborigines, the tribe that lived peacefully on the Australian continent for 40,000 years or so, Australia day has a completely different meaning. For them, Australia day symbolises invasion, genocides, and oppression. January 26 was the day their homes were taken, the coloniser's rule began, and an age of cruelty against their people began.

As a result, a significant portion of the Aboriginal history and culture has been lost, and the remaining population of Aborigines has been reduced to 2% in recent times. For this reason, some call this day invasion day. In recent years, there has been a movement to change the date of Australia day so that everyone can celebrate together.

Others argue that changing the dates will not change the dark facts of the past, and that in order to remember these mistakes and never repeat them in the future, it is important to not change the date of Australia day.

The latter argument may sound like it makes sense at first, but it raises the question of "do typical Australians reflect on our history on Australia day?" In 2008, a formal apology was issued by our government addressed to the Aboriginal people, regarding the continued unfair treatment of their people. The speech promised to never repeat the horrific mistakes of the past, to put greater efforts in undoing the damage that has been caused to them, and to aim for a better future together as Australians.

Personally, I feel that the overall attitude towards the Aboriginal people seems to be improving. For example, the formal apology issued by the government is a good sign, as well as the number and types of aids available for aborigines are increasing. Hopefully the wall that divides the people living in Australia will gradually break down. On the other hand, when I imagine what the aboriginal people see on Australia day every year, with people celebrating 'straya with some prawns on the barbie with a beer in hand, I think maybe we have a long way to go.