

# Toward a New Chapter in Korea-Japan Relations

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## Introduction

Warm greetings in the name of Jesus Christ! Mr. President, Chairpersons, honored guests and members of the Federation, it is indeed an honor and a privilege to be able to speak to you and be a part of this historic gathering today. I have enjoyed the camaraderie with Dr. Won Sul Lee and Mr. An Doo-Sun over the years. Ever since my first encounter with them in Australia five years ago during the Asia-Pacific Federation of Christian Schools Convention where Dr. Lee chaired numerous sessions, I have been enjoying their deep friendship. About two years ago I happened to be in the Federation's Office and located a copy of Dr. Lee's book, Writing the Vision. Right there I started reading it and became fascinated by it. Upon returning to Japan the idea to translate his book into Japanese came to me. It is now available in the Japanese edition as published by the Kirisuto Shinbunsha Publishing Corporation in Tokyo. Some copies are available for you here today. I was very much honored to translate into Japanese the life story of my mentor, Dr. Lee.

## The Church in Society

I am a second generation Christian in Japan. My mother lost her own mother

at the age of fourteen and an American missionary in the area sent by the United Church of Christ, Boston, Mass. raised my mother as her own daughter. My mother subsequently became Christian and made a commitment to be engaged in Christian ministries - even at her young age. She underwent theological training and together with my father, whom she had met in church, decided to build a small church in an area where there were no Christian churches: my father became principal of the kindergarten and my mother became the pastor of a small congregation. They made many sacrifices for the sake of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in the area and sold their house in order to have a small structure built for worship. I grew up in the tiny cramped room which served as our living space as well as a worship space. Since childhood I have learned that the church is not a building; those who believe in the gospels and follow examples of Christ in concrete social settings indeed become the church. There are churches with large congregations and huge structures, but faith can never be measured in terms of the size of the building. Christians are a small minority in Japan, still less than one percent of the total population of slightly over one hundred twenty million. Christians, however, have always been a small minority in the biblical sense and yet have impacted social change in ancient times as well as today. When we are members of the majority, we tend to become arrogant and complacent, unless we have a specific sense of mission in society. What is the church for? Is it solely for the comfort and satisfaction of the mass? Or is it for making a definite impact upon structural change of society and of the world? If we see someone who is suffering from poverty or social oppression, what should we do-preach to him or try to help change the very thing that is causing poverty and oppression? Even the word of God falls on a deaf ear, if someone's stomach is empty. If s/he is hungry, they must first be fed, and then they may be ready for the word of God. If we walk around Calcutta, India or Zimbabwe, we might run

across people who have fallen ill and dead right on the streets and almost no one gives heed. The misery of this is not just that poverty exists, but the fact that no one seems to care. There is a deep sense of nihilism today - not only in poverty-stricken areas, but in our own affluent societies. We have become so wealthy and so self-centered that we have often lost the sense of warm community in which people used to genuinely care about each other. In the House of Hope in Calcutta, Mother Teresa knew that even the last few moments of warmth and caring would give dying persons a glimpse of hope in humanity and that they would die as living human beings. That's the gospel, I believe. The church today, whether in the United States, Korea or Japan, perhaps is too affluent, too involved in its little concerns and divisiveness, and as a result its door is tightly shut. That door would open only to those who agree with its theological, ecclesiastical or social stances. Russian novelist, Turgenev, long ago declared that the face of a poor man you see in daily living is the face of Christ. Mother Teresa framed her whole life around the notion that we see Christ "in the distressing disguise of the poor and dying." Her Sisters of Charity believe they touch the body of Christ when they help the poor. In the world of the haves and have-nots perhaps through our churches in Korea as well as in Japan we could work together to create a new image and understanding of the mission of the Church.

## Students' Contributions

I believe that you have probably known or read about various ethnic groups living in Japan. The Ainu, native to the Japanese soil, seem to be very close to Native Americans. Another group, the Buraku people, as well as other ethnic groups, mainly Koreans and Chinese, have been discriminated against and alienated from the mainstream of life in Japan. Japan is a racist society so

much so that I am encouraging my students who are engaged in policy studies at our university, to work on concrete political and social policies related to ethnic empowerment and to become instruments in helping to bring about some substantial change in the Japanese power structure. This will be a big part of their contribution to the Japanese society and the world. In the School of Policy Studies of Kwansai Gakuin University we have a number of students who come from Korea and China: there are also Japanese students who have lived overseas. Among a full-time faculty of forty-two, there are fourteen foreign professors. Our School of Policy Studies is similar to the United States; a country comprised of "immigrants" which allows for a certain dynamism: each of these people makes unique contributions to the life and work of the university. Japanese society should be like that, too - accepting and appreciating diversities. There are definitely xenophobic prejudices in Japan, which we all need to overcome sooner or later, if Japan truly wants to become global - global not in the sense of latching on to the tail of the United States, but opening herself wide to the critique of the world. For the last seven years I have taken twenty to twenty-five students to the Philippines and Vietnam twice a year to be engaged in Habitat for Humanity International projects. We help build houses for the slum dwellers who are then able to live in more comfortable abodes. Other groups of students have visited Korea in the last few years in order to participate in the similar Habitat projects. In August of last year, my students rode bicycles from the University to Shimonoseki, in the southern part of Japan, took a ferry to Pusan and cycled all the way to the Habitat site where they were joined by Korean students. This year Dr. Won Sul Lee and Mr. An Doo-Son were thoughtful enough to join my students in giving them lectures and counsel on Korea-Japan relations. My students greatly enjoyed working with Korean students and want to expand their mutual friendships in even more meaningful experiences in years to come. Upon returning to Japan, my students and I have

been exploring possibilities of grappling with some poignant problems facing Koreans in Japan. Through the K.C.C.J. (The Korean Christian Church in Japan) we are inviting Choong Shik Choi to engage in a dialogue about what we can do together to tackle some issues facing Koreans specifically, as well as Japanese, in the Japanese society. For example, the question of voting rights, the naturalization process and even citizenship by birth are compelling problems. Koreans are not considered to be Japanese nationals, even though they are born and raised in Japan. We have an ancient method of keeping a family registry: unless you have family roots in Japan, it is extremely difficult to become a Japanese citizen. I would very much like to see this changed. Naturally, we will need some legal counsel in order to gather up-to-date information. We must galvanize Korean attorneys as well as their Japanese counterparts to tackle those issues. Institutional change is slow and hard, but it has to be brought about sooner or later, if Japan wants to become truly global. If Japan does not wish to change, then change will be forced upon her. And some institutional changes - economic and social - are already in the offing.

## Images of Korea in Japan

Partly because of domestic affluence among the Korean people, many have been able to travel abroad - especially to Japan. And I wonder how Japan appears to them? This past year 'Winter Sonata,' the Korean love story on TV, has been ever popular - especially among middle-aged women. So many house wives have joined organized tours to visit Korea in the hope of seeing the main character of the drama, Bae Yong Joon. The "Korea boom" has been sweeping across Japan in the past few years: quite a few people have been engaged in the study of the Korean language and culture. More Japanese are going to Korea than ever before. So it appears that the country which has been

considered 'near and yet so far' has been brought closer because of recent exchanges between the two countries. Sport events have also helped both countries come closer. And yet I cannot help but think that Japan's interest in Korea is skin-deep. If Japanese are truly interested in Korea, they must first show an interest in correcting Japan's warped description of Korean history. Engaging themselves in the study of history may bring both countries and peoples closer together. Nine years ago I was a member of the delegation from some ten Christian-related universities in Japan. We had a very meaningful visit with Christians here and witnessed a member of the Japanese delegation making apologies to the people here for what the Japanese did to your people during World War II. I am in the hope that the Japanese head of the state will someday make formal apologies to your people for what the Japanese did during the war. I believe that every one of us has certain responsibility for what happened in the past, as long as s/he receives benefits from that particular state, even though s/he has not committed any specific criminal or unethical acts.

## Future Endeavors

A few years ago, historians both from Japan and Korea came together to draft a joint history textbook that could be used in Korea as well as Japan. That was an epoch-making attempt to correct some misconceptions of history. History, I believe, has always been written by the conqueror or the majority at best and not by the victim or by the minority. History as it has been written by the majority must look quite different from the minority perspective. We should develop a comprehensive tool with which to read and understand history with less bias. One of my graduate students wrote a Master's Thesis on the comparative study of history textbooks in Korea and Japan. Dr. Won Sul Lee

and Mr. An Doo-Sun had been quite helpful in providing this student with needed resources in his research. His main discoveries are that even though there has been some improvement made in the description of Korean history, the Japanese have not decided to accept reality yet. Some Cabinet members in the Japanese Diet openly proclaimed that there was no 'Nan-King massacre' or that the so-called Korean "comfort women" during World War II can be justified, because they were needed at battlefields in order to quench the "thirst" of Japanese soldiers in combat. We tend to read history for our own benefit and advantage. But we need to go beyond that: What is sorely needed today is not emotional flair-ups about certain descriptions of historical events, but rather cool-headed scholars who can come together to write a joint history book. More than anything else, we should encourage ourselves here in Korea and in Japan to come to fathom the meaning of 'historicity' - that is, how to interpret history. Yonsei University and Kwansai Gakuin University enjoy mutual relationships - this is where the work should all begin. Faculty exchange, and eventually, student exchange may propel Japan and Korea into a new era of academic venture. So many universities in Japan have been North-America and Europe-oriented, but I believe it is time that we considered the greater Asia area as a basin of scholastic and academic exchange. I see something else, too, that I envisage as a possibility for mutual understanding. The Japanese Christian population is less than one percent, whereas in Korea the Christian population comprises the majority. Both Korea and Japan share some mutual religious culture in common: in both countries, Confucianism has been at the very base of society and social values have evolved around Confucian teachings. And yet the Christian gospels have penetrated the Korean society much faster and far deeper than that of Japan. So I believe that if we discussed the differences between the two countries regarding the acceptance of Christian religion, we may come to a better understanding of each other. I personally believe that

you have valuable lessons to share with Christians in Japan. On a theological basis, we could have institutional exchange: we should debate theological and ecclesiastical similarities as well as differences. We should make an effort to exchange faculty among theological schools: we should also usher into student exchange as well. I also suggest that we exchange chaplains among Christian universities here and in Japan - even on a short term basis. I have also been entertaining the idea of hiring Asian-American and African-American English teachers on our campus: we have an overabundance of whites teaching English in Japan - and probably in Korea as well. If we hired Asian-or African-American English teachers, they could share their various cultures with our students, who would benefit greatly from person to person relationships. These are but a few suggestions. Together we could certainly come up with more and better projects which we can jointly pursue.

### University Ideal

On September 11, 2001, I was in Washington, D.C. with fourteen research seminar students of mine and witnessed the horror of terrorism. I walked around town, listening and speaking to people about the magnitude of their experience. Almost all TV stations carried the slogan America Under Attack on the TV screen. America was attacked from outside for the first time in her history. America's counterattack on Afghanistan ensued with horrendous bombing to smoke Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda out. Many Americans found it very difficult to accept the fact that the United States had been hated so much. A Union Theological Seminary professor in New York City issued a statement which called for restrictions on bombing Afghanistan and for national repentance. But there were very few prophetic voices heard to the contrary. So many Americans understood terrorism only as a violent attack upon themselves from

outside, but failed to see that there had been so much domestic violence and terrorism directed against native-and African-Americans. "First take the log out of your own eyes, then you can see clearly the speck in your brother's eye." This is exactly the kind of perspective we should acquire and this is what we should encourage our university students to have. One of the prophetic voices of today, Cornel West, an African-American, has this to say in his new book, Democracy Matters:

I examined the increasing nihilism in black-America as the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and most important - lovelessness. This monumental collapse of meaning, hope and love primarily resulted from the saturation of market forces and moralities in black-life and the present crisis of black leadership. Needless to say, nihilism is not confined to black-America. Psychic depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair are widespread in America as a whole.

This I find to be true in any affluent society like those of which you and I are a part. And this is where so many of our students find themselves today. The responsibility of Christian institutions is quite clear: in working with our students we will have to help our students find meaning, worth and hope in their being. Furthermore, we should work with them in such a way that they will find a definite meaning in dedicating themselves to the structural change of society and helping to bring about a peaceful world. It is a sad fact that there are so many universities which are profit-oriented and so are some of our own Christian-universities. So many of them are without the Founder's spirit or the Founder's Philosophy. So we should ask ourselves why there should be higher education and what we are supposed to do in it. Even though many of our institutions do uphold the Founder's Philosophy, they have become spineless.

Do we have the courage to go against the grain of society, when the call of God contradicts the generally accepted social values? Are we prepared to raise students who could commit themselves to social change? We should encourage our students to go beyond their personal concerns to be engaged in various services in the community and the world. But before we challenge them to venture on, we faculty and staff must have a definite sense of commitment to live those Ideals. In the bureaucratic system of our institutions, we should have the fortitude to stand firmly and say "no" to some bureaucratic power which may go against the dictates of Christian principles, and present concrete alternatives. In the world of profit-seeking and market moralities, it is the Christian institutions which could transform and propel our societies into a modern-day Kingdom of God on earth. Let us work toward the realization of this ideal and renewing of bureaucratized educational system in our own Christian institutions.

Blessings on you and your institutions. Thank you.

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