

My Experiences in Korea

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To the Washington, DC family



View from street of main church at Chungpadong, Seoul

As you all know, I have just returned from having spent about 14 months in Korea as editor of *The Way of the World* and director of the Seoul Western Center. It is difficult in the short time that I have to fully share the experience of almost a year and a half, especially when that period had such a profound effect on my life. However, I will do my best to convey the flavor of what it is like living in Korea, and the spiritual quality of our Korean family.

I had been to Korea briefly before in 1970 and 1971 on missions for the Freedom Leadership Foundation. One thing that struck me as that, even after an absence of only a year, the city of Seoul seemed to change significantly every time I visited it. And even as I was living there, the country was experiencing rapid changes, both internally and externally.

Externally, new buildings are always going up in Seoul. Before 1960, the tallest building was 12 stories; as of a few years ago, the tallest was 31 stories; now a 36 story building has just been completed, and taller are on the drawing boards, including our own headquarters building of 43 stories, the skyline of Seoul is constantly changing. A new subway is under construction (the only one in Asia outside of Japan and China) which will be completed at the end of this year. In general, Seoul seems to have a sort of exciting boom-town atmosphere -- it's really a city on the move, although this is accompanied by the usual problems of pollution and overcrowding. Economically, South Korea, as most of you have read, has undergone a miraculous transformation since the Korean War. Poverty, by Western standards, is still evident, but compared to other Asian nations, Korea is significantly ahead of Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines, is on a par with Taiwan in many areas, and is expected to reach Western European levels of development by the end of the current five-year plan in 1976. This is incredible when you consider that Korea was prostrate, devastated and seemingly hopelessly backward right after the Korean War, and really didn't get off the ground until the tum of the '60's, only 13 years ago.

Politically also, Korea went through profound changes while I was there. Rapid developments on the international scene such as Nixon's trip to China and the mood of detente in Europe had a profound effect on the Korean political situation. President Park declared a state of emergency, the Red Cross talks between North and South Korea began, and the structure of the government was completely changed under the "Yushin" or "revitalizing reforms" policy' which abolished the old two-party system and established a Unification Council. In general, President Park is seeking to unify the people spiritually as well as administratively in order to cope with the coming negotiations and competition with North Korea.

Internationally, Korea has opened up diplomatic relations with so-called "non-hostile" Communist nations such as Russia and Yugoslavia. At the recent Universiad games in Moscow, the games at which the Israeli team was jeered by the Russians, Korean basketball and volleyball teams participated, and were very well received. The teams received a hero's welcome when they came back to Korea; this is the first time in nearly 30 years that Korea has had relations with the Soviet Union. I have heard it said that it is a good bet that the Little Angels might even perform in Moscow before long.

All this is to set the stage for what I'm sure you're most interested in, which is the spiritual climate of Korea and the progress and development of our Korean family. First, I will describe a little about my impressions of the Korean character in general, along with what I've experienced about our Korean family's spirit, and then I'll recount some of the recent developments of our church in Korea.

First of all, Korea has a tradition which stretches back more than 4,000 years, the longest unbroken tradition of any people besides the Jews. They date the founding of Korea precisely 4,306 years ago with the coming of the mythical figure Tangun, whom anthropologists assume was a nomadic chieftain from some Tungusic tribe. Korea has undergone cross-culturization and invasion from China, Mongolia, Japan, and most recently the West. However, even during the worst periods of foreign oppression the Koreans always maintained their own unique culture, tradition and language, while at the same time assimilating

foreign ideas with a wholeheartedness which made the new influences a further part of their own unique culture. The Chinese used to call Korea "The Land of the Superior Man," because the Koreans adopted Confucian ethics and scholarship with such enthusiasm and ability that it put China's best scholars to shame.



Buddhist scriptures, Tripitaka Koreana, inscribed on wooden plates (81,258 blocks) during the Koryo Dynasty (918-1392), are preserved at Hainsa Temple.

With the coming of Buddhism, Koreans also wholeheartedly embraced the new thought; now Korea has the largest and most complete collection of Buddhist scriptures in the world, at Heinsa Temple in Kyongju, carved on 80 000 wood blocks. Also, Christianity was adopted with such enthusiasm that Billy Graham has called Korea a "gravitational center" for Christianity and a "spiritual super-power." Even Communism has been adopted with such fervor in North Korea that it has a reputation for being the most rigid authoritarian and thoroughly communized Stalinist regime in the world.

This wholeheartedness of the Koreans seems to be their most prominent trait-whatever they do, they put their whole selves into it. One of the most amazing and moving experiences I have ever had was when one of our Korean family was giving his testimony, and began describing how, when his father was dying, he couldn't communicate to him the great new truth of the Divine Principle.

As he began to describe the deathbed scene, he suddenly broke down and wept with a deep anguish and grief at least as great as that he'd experienced so many years ago at his father's bedside -- all those years hadn't dulled his grief one bit. In general, Koreans seem to feel things much more deeply than we do in the West. They gave me the impression that their hearts had depths and dimensions that I could never plumb; indeed, I felt very callow and insensitive in comparison to them.

Part of this depth of heart I think is a result of the fact that Korea has undergone a long history of tragedy and misery from foreign oppressors. The Mongols, Manchus, Japanese, Russians, and most recently the Korean Communists have inflicted immense tragedies upon the Korean people; the Korean War was only the latest in a series of devastations which have hit the peninsula.

Nonetheless, the Koreans have always bounced back with a resilience and courage which I am sure is unparalleled anywhere in the world. Their sufferings have given the Koreans an undercurrent of melancholy. For example, in Korea birds don't "sing," they "cry." A Korean cannot say "the birds sing merrily," because the word they use to describe the sound a bird makes is the same as that used to describe the expression of human grief. Whenever our Korean family gathers to pray, there is copious weeping. More than any other people that I have known, the Koreans really feel the sorrowful heart of our Heavenly Father.

Along with that the Koreans express a spirit of sacrifice and martyrdom. Koreans have, as a nation, experienced untold sacrifices because of foreign oppressors, and today, even in peacetime, Koreans are happy to work very hard for very poor rewards for the sake of their country. This spirit of sacrifice is especially evident in our Korean family; in the early days, some of the members even died of malnutrition because they worked so hard for God without thinking of what to eat. For Western family members, we have so much material affluence as it is that it is easy to give it up; but in a country which is desperately poor to begin with, to work sacrificially for God for no material reward is many times more difficult.

Nonetheless, in spite of all their hardships, the Koreans have an irrepressible ebullience which breaks out very often in broad humor and hilarity. This is seen most expressively in Korean folk dances and masked drama, which are always full of earthy humor and satire, and always have the audience roaring. I have experienced many times with our Korean family when a comedy skit or mime would have everyone rocking and aching helplessly with laughter. In comparison, the Japanese and Chinese are very straitlaced; if you joke or kid a Japanese, they will usually take you seriously and become quite concerned or flustered; but if you kid a Korean, he immediately picks it up and responds with a jibe of his own. I have heard it said that the English and Americans, who are always great kidders, get along much better with the Koreans than with the Chinese or Japanese.

Along with his natural ebullience goes a cockiness and self-assurance which is truly wondrous to behold. The average young Korean male, regardless of his station in life, invariably has great ambitions to be a business tycoon or great statesman. A Korean may know next to nothing about cars or electronics, but he will think nothing about tearing apart a balky car or telephone and by some miracle have it working again. This creative spirit is also manifested in a native inventiveness and ingenuity. For example, it was recently discovered that Koreans were the first to use movable metal type, almost two hundred years before Gutenberg. Also, Koreans invented the first ironclad battleship and were among the first peoples of Asia to begin the systematic study of the stars.

One of the most remarkable Korean inventions is Hangul, the Korean alphabet, invented by King Sejong in the fourteenth century; a remarkably logical and scientific phonetic alphabet which is the only alphabet to have been consciously invented, rather than developing haphazardly over the years. For this reason, Koreans are among the most literate people of Asia, and have a passion for scholarship and education. Korea has a very large proportion of college students for a developing country.

Korea has an optimism and pioneering spirit which reminds me a lot of what it must have been like in the early pioneering days of America. In America we have the Horatio Alger "rags-to-riches" folk "hero; in Korea they have the "dragon found in a ditch"; that is, a low-born person who rises to great heights by wit and hard work. I have met more than one such person in Korea; dynamic, noble characters, clearly headed for greatness, who were raised in conditions of utmost poverty and hardship.

This sort of idealism characterizes to a large extent the Korean national aspirations as a whole. The Koreans have the most amazing ambitions for their country, as is seen most clearly in the fact that this movement, which seeks nothing less than the transformation of the whole world, came out of Korea; the Koreans are the only people that I know from a small country who have the gumption to imagine that they can transform the world. This is not only limited to our family; I read an article in *The Korea Journal* by Dr. An Pyong-Uk, a famous philosopher, about the attitude that Koreans should have toward their nation. He made the point that great civilizations have never arisen from large countries; for example, the Hellenic civilization arose from the tiny city-state of Athens; the Renaissance came out of the miniscule city of Florence; and the world-transforming power of Christianity came from the tiny state of Israel.

Considering the 4,000-year tradition of Korea, the toughness and resilience of the people in the face of adversity, its position as a crossroads of Eastern and Western culture, and its position in the temperate zone from which the great civilizations have come, Dr. An insists that Korea will be the place from which the next great world civilization will arise. Indeed, there has been a Messianic expectation in Korea for the last 500 years, when a book of prophecy came out at the beginning of the Yi dynasty predicting that "The Man of True Words" would come from Korea, and that Korea would be a light unto the world. There are several religious groups in Korea who believe this, and many spiritualists in Korea have received this revelation.

Finally, no description of the Korean character would be complete without a description of Korean spirituality. It is said that in the days before Christianity came to Korea, when a foreign traveler would ask a Korean about his religion he would usually reply, "I have no religion"; and yet he would worship his ancestors, go up on a mountain to meditate and pray, give offerings to the spirits, and send his wife to a Buddhist temple to pray for a son. What we know of as "religion" to a Korean has always been just an everyday aspect of life, and the spirit world was always as real and ever-present as the fields, forests and mountains. Koreans always believed in a personal God called Hananim; legend has it that Tangun himself began the worship of Hananim, and the altar that he set up stands to this day in North Korea. Mountains have always been associated with man's search for God, and in Korea, which is 74 percent mountains, Koreans have always been inclined to go up on a mountain to meditate and pray. In the early days of our church, when the Korean family was enduring persecution from the established churches, they could not say directly that they were from the Unification Church or they would be immediately rejected; so, some members, as a ruse to enable them to witness, would say that they had been up on a mountain for ten years meditating and had received a revelation which they wanted to share; and then they would proceed to teach the Principle. The idea of going up on a mountain for ten years was just plausible enough to a

Korean to make the ruse work.

Many of the Korean members I talked to were guided directly to the Principle through dreams and revelations. I have even heard stories of people who spiritually received the very street and house where our family was holding its lectures. This ever-present spirituality has led many Westerners to think that Koreans are a superstitious people. This is partly true, in the sense that much of the spirituality of the Koreans is still primitive and not centered on God. However, as we know from the Principle, the spirit world is a concrete reality, as scientists are beginning to find out. In the light of all the research into parapsychology and the increased interest in man's spiritual nature recently, who can say that Korea won't lead the world in that area?

I will conclude my report by describing some of the recent developments in the progress of the Korean church and the Seoul Western Center. The most exciting thing going on right now has been the tremendous progress made with Korean intellectuals and academic leaders. I'm sure you have all heard of the Divine Principle seminar for prominent people, which took place on December 27 last year, to which 110 professors came.

Also, I'm sure you have read of the very positive comments of the professors about Unification Thought and our church. Most of those professors and many more have now been organized into the "Professor's World Peace Academy," which was formed last May. The last time I heard, 168 professors and academic leaders are members. The purpose of the PWP A is to pursue the study of peace as an academic discipline. The president of the PWP A, Dr. Lee Hang-Nyong, president of Hongik University, remarked in his opening speech that this is the third time that Korean professors have been organized - the first two times were in response to the student uprising of 1960 and the student protests against the Japan-Korea treaty in 1965. This time, however, the professors weren't just reacting to crises, but preparing in advance for crises to come. Furthermore, the previous organizations were temporary, but PWP A is permanent, President Lee said.

Thus the PWP A was seen to have real historical significance in regards to Korea's development.

Our Korean family runs the secretariat and publishes the official magazine, "Forum," which publishes the scholarly papers of the members. Plans for the future include increased international contacts with scholars around the world and an awards program similar to the Nobel Prize, for scholars making significant contributions for world peace and unification.

It is very exciting to see how influential the Principle is becoming in the academic field. Right now the Korean family is reaching the intellectuals with Unification Thought, which is Dr. Lee Sang-Hun's application of the Principle to philosophy, and deals with such things as ontology, epistemology, axiology, ethics, aesthetics and so on. At Myongji University, a Christian college, Unification Thought and Divine Principle are part of the curriculum, and Mr. Kwak Chung-Hwan, the former CARP leader, is now a special lecturer at Myongji nearly full time.

In the economic field, great progress has been made also. Recently the new ginseng tea factory was opened at Sootaek-Ri, which has vastly improved and expanded facilities and will allow production of a greater volume of ginseng tea as well as the manufacture of such things as ginseng soap, ginseng cola, ginseng tonic, etc. Also our family has taken over a titanium plant in Incheon. Titanium is a metal used in making white pigments for paints and dyes, and is a component in such things as jet engine parts. I visited the factory-it was very impressive, and really had the look of heavy industry. This promises to be a real growth industry, because as Korea becomes more industrialized, the demand for titanium will grow, and also they plan to export to foreign countries in the future. So the future looks bright for the Korean family, both spiritually and physically.

As for the Seoul Western Center, we too have experienced progress. God has guided us to many good people in the diplomatic and missionary community in Korea. In the future, the Seoul Western Center will become an extension of the American church, and have the same status as a foreign mission in Korea. Eventually in this way we hope to be able to begin social service programs for the Korean people such as orphanages, day care centers and so forth, financed with the help of the American family.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the progress in Korea depends a great deal on how well we succeed in America. Korea as a nation is tremendously dependent on America, particularly in regards to the economy and military aid. Consequently, whatever we do in America for the Principle will have a tremendous impact in Korea. Therefore, we know that the best way to help Korea, is to make the greatest victory we possibly can here in America.