

## Agenda for Cultural Cooperation\*

Kwang-Ok Kim\*\*

### Abstract

Since the mutual understanding between people is the basis of other political and economic relationship, it is necessary to construct a cultural community where all the nations within the Yellow Sea Rim play an integral part.

From the initial stage of contact during in the late 1980's, there have been various experiences of conflict between Koreans and Chinese mainly because of misunderstanding and ignorance of each other.

Therefore, several ways are suggested to promote the cultural understanding between Korea and China: 1) We need to develop the shared cultural tradition, i.e., Confucian tradition, Chinese characters, folk customs and popular culture etc. 2) In addition to commercial contacts, cultural exchange programmes should be developed. 3) Education and academic research projects should be encouraged in order to achieve scientific understanding and to learn from other's experiences. 4) Based on the shared idea of the quality of life, the member countries can cooperate in order to solve the negative problems, social and environmental, resulted from the economic-oriented development projects. 5) Mass media especially T.V. is the most influential and effective for the promotion of proper understanding of

---

\*Prepared for the international conference on "The Issues of Development in the Yellow Sea Region," Organized by the Institute of Social Sciences, Seoul National University, Korea, and Korea Study Center, Shandong University, People's Republic of China, on June 9-11, 1994, Jinan, China.

\*\*Professor of Anthropology, Seoul National University.

neighbouring countries. Therefore, the cooperation among the mass media among the member countries is urgently needed. 6) Especially the Chinese authority is required to develop the tourism industry not only because it is an important source of national income but also it is the field which can help foreigners achieve the cultural understanding of China.

As a whole, we need to exploit fully the human resources especially the Shandong huachiao in Korea and Korean minorities in China for the betterment of Sino-Korean relationship at the civilian level.

### **1. Why "Cultural"?**

There are various reasons to emphasize the importance of cultural understanding between especially China and Korea in order to build up the Yellow Sea Rim Regional Cooperation. Needless to say, political and economic partnership is the basic of the international relationship. However, a proper relationship between the two countries is established mainly on the basis of economic calculation and political compromise in order to maximize the interest of the nation concerned. Therefore, such a relationship is vulnerable to the changing situation and terms of interaction. In this regard, it is obvious that the proper international relationship is made possible only when it is attempted on the basis of the idea of a cultural community.

Conventionally, culture is defined as a way of life and mode of thinking shared by a group of people. It involves customs, social institutions, manners, value system, moral codes, and world view. It also concerns with people's idea of the universe, of the relation between man and nature, of defining the material and social condition of living, taste of life, arts and leisure.

Economic wealth and political integration are necessary to improve the quality of life, which is assessed in terms of culture. At the same time, cultural communication is the

most effective way to achieve a proper understanding between peoples and societies.

Cultural space often expands beyond the political boundaries and nations within the Yellow Sea Rim region are interrelated to the extent that what is happening in China becomes a serious concern of the neighbouring countries.

Despite the close political, economic, cultural, and historical mutuality between Korea and China, there has been no contact between them since 1949. It is only since late 1980's that the two countries began to establish a new relationship. However, they approach each other without considering the nature of previous politico-historical relationship and deeper understanding of the contemporary social reality.

## **2. The Pattern of Recent Contact**

At the initial stage of contact, the Korean government approved only a limited number of journalists and politically oriented professors to try the opportunity to visit China.

The visitors of this first category were not properly trained enough to achieve a scientific understanding. At the same time, they were not given sufficient time to try a full experience of life in China since their visit was short in time and made by chance on the one hand and controlled by the Chinese authorities on the other. Based on the superficial and piecemeal understanding, their reports were mostly impressionistic description of occasional findings. In a word, through the mass media, the simple-minded visitors produced various versions of misleading picture of China, which is the country of more than 10 billion people with varieties of ethnic, regional, cultural, and socioeconomic background.

Descriptions of their personal experiences in China as a poor and backward society were useful for the government to manipulate people's belief in the superiority of capitalistic system and thus to confirm the basis of their political power

and legitimacy.

The next group is that of medium-sized businessmen and tourists: Not particularly concerned with mutual understanding, businessmen are preoccupied with a chance to make their own economic profit. As tourists, these people show off their economic wealth before the Chinese on-lookers. Their braggart consuming behaviour generated a misleading image of Korea as one of the richest countries in the world.

China is also responsible for the distorted impression of herself. Until recently, foreigners have not been allowed to move freely. Tour courses were carefully arranged and visitors were not given opportunity to meet local people. Chauvinistic or protectionistic attitude of the Chinese toward foreigners is moulded through their historical experience of the invading and exploiting foreign powers in the modern era. Though it is obvious that Korea has not been such a big power enough to threaten China's wealth and security, the Chinese government maintained a protectionist attitude toward Korea. Within a limited area of experience, Korean visitors were blocked from the negative aspect of China. Without a proper understanding of people, there were frequent misunderstanding and even abuses of the distorted image.

At the same time, Chinese T.V. mainly showed Korea's negative scenery, for example, student anti-government demonstration, political struggles, and corruption, while Korean T.V. focuses on the rapidly growing Chinese economy and industry. This means that Korean mass media failed to provide proper knowledge about the actual life of ordinary Chinese people while the Chinese understand Korea as a curious mixture of social instability and economic miracle.

### **3. Conflicting Aspects in Understanding**

#### **1. Differences in Administrative and Organizational System**

At present, capitalist and market economy is practiced in the frame of socialist ideology in China. As they have no sufficient experience of the newly introduced economic system, the Chinese exploit their traditional human relationship (guanxi) and emotional tie (ganching) in their everyday practice of economic activities. Since quite often the private relationship exceeds the legal system, anyone who has not proper guanxi network would suffer in dealing with business.

At the institutional level, China has a dual system in that administrative unit and the Chinese Communist Party are interrelated to make one body. Because of this peculiar system, foreigners suffer from the bureaucratic inefficiency and complicated administrative procedure in China.

This is contrasted with Korea where a political party is not allowed to play a decisionmaking role and to enjoy the dictatorial rule over every field of people's life.

#### **2. Research in Conflict**

In Korea, research is highly regarded and the result is open to the public use. University professors and research workers are facilitated by research grants from governmental institutions and private foundations. Until recently in China, however, intellectuals and academic researches have not been favoured in the new socialist revolutionary programmes. Obviously, without proper understanding of the society concerned, no proper policy or efficient implementation of policy is possible. Although it is well recognized, investigation and information collection are mostly monopolized by the administrative authority and not open to the public use in academic purpose.

There exists a sharp difference between Korea and China as to the social status of academicians. While in Korea education and knowledge are regarded most important and university professor is the most prestigious job, intellectuals in China in general are lower than bureaucrats and party cadres in terms of social and economic status.

Whilst educational background and knowledge are highly regarded in Korea, the size of economic income and power are most important for personal qualification in contemporary China. The result is that highly developed knowledge and technology are concentrated in a handful of the intellectual elite in China, whereas they are more widely distributed among people in Korea. Thus, there quite often arise misunderstanding and conflict between Korea businessman's expectancy and the Chinese employee over the quality of skilled labour.

### **3. Difference in Interest**

China as a whole is mainly concerned with the development of economic relation with the U.S.A., Japan, and overseas Chinese. It is true that Korea, as a late comer, is still small in the size of investment and her industrial committment is usually concentrated on a few regions where Korean minority of overseas Chinese who speak Korean can be recruited as interpreter and business-administration broker. Therefore, while Beijing, Tianjin, Shandong, and the three provinces of the Northeast are favoured by the Korean businessmen, other areas are difficult for them to approach.

### **4. Problem of Economic Orientation**

Since they are single-mindedly enthusiastic toward economic development, the Chinese appear not to realize the serious question of negative results of rapid development and uncontrolled industrialization, i.e., pollution, environmental deterioration, new class conflict, regional competition and antagonism, illegal migration, urban-rural gap, economic crime, and social instability or disintegration, etc.

More than this, they are not seemed to seriously consider the possible conflict between nations over the issue of environmental protection and public health which are threatened by uncontrolled industrialization in China. For example, pollution of Yellow River leads the pollution of Yellow Sea, which again destroys the marine resources. Air pollution in China affects seriously Korea and eventually causes many health care problems in China, Korea, and Japan.

All the problems mentioned above can properly be solved only when the three nations have the common idea that the Yellow Sea Rim is their own community. This is achieved only when people in the region share the cultural understanding and value system.

#### **4. How to Achieve the Cultural Understanding?**

##### **1. Common Cultural Background**

Although Confucianism was officially denounced during a certain period of the Cultural revolution in Cina, still its tradition is deeply embedded in people's everyday life of both the Chinese and Koreans. They share the Confucian tradition of familism, idea of cultivation, social ethics and communal welfare, and literaty tradition (educational enthusiasm). Although the Chinese social behaviour based on the Confucian cultural tradition might appear to the Westerner's eyes as irrational, it is quite natural to Korean.

It is noted that China, Korea, and Japan share the same cultural tradition and civilization including writing system (Chinese letter), folk religions and folk customs based on lunar calendar system (which the Japanese do not use any longer) and seasonal festivals. Koreans and Chinese also share the same historical experiences in terms of anti-colonial and anti-imperial fights during the early part of the present century.

In this context, there are many ways for Koreans and the

Chinese to achieve the cultural understanding. Especially Koreans share the behavioural pattern and psychological attitude with people of North China, i.e., Shandong, Beijing, and the three provinces of the Northeast. Furthermore, many of Koreans knowledge of Chinese culture and civilization are related with the Eastern China, i.e., Jiangsu, Shanghai, and Zhejiang.

## **2. Cultural Exchange Programmes**

During the past couple of years, there were several occasions for Chinese exhibition in the form of trade fair, which aimed at introducing Chinese goods and attracting Korean investment. With these exhibitions, commercial delegation teams paid visits to Korea from various cities and provinces; Fenglai, Yantai, Chingdao (Shandong), Tianjin, Liaoning, Hebei provinces, and five provinces of the Lower Yangtze including Shanghai, Jiangsu, Anhwei, Hubei, and Zhejiang. Compared with these business delegates, there has been no cultural programme except a touring performance of Hebei circus troupe, a book fair by Hong Kong based Sanlien publishing company, and exchange exhibition of calligraphy organized by a local calligrapher. There are two book stores in Seoul dealing with books from the mainland China. Chinese Embassy is still in its infancy in cultural activities.

In order to promote cultural understanding, it is necessary to provide people with opportunities to experience the national culture in everyday life context. Film festivals, popular art performances, exchanging visit programmes are among many ways to achieve the goal. More than anything else, educational and academic exchange programmes should be developed. Through the educational program the future generation of the two countries can make the mutual friendship and the cooperative academic research works enable us to achieve a proper and full understanding of society and culture of the country concerned.



### **3. Idea for the Quality of Life**

Since the three nations are at different stages of economic and political development, each country has its own interest and goal to achieve. However, people of the three countries have to develop a philosophy about life based on the shared world view. Communal ideology and perception of the Yellow Sea Rim as an integrated community are fundamental. Only from this idea of community, the philosophy of environment protection and ecology preservation for all is realized over the regional orientation for economic interest.

### **4. Academic Activities**

Since economic and political interest is based on conditional compromise in the process of competition, the mutual friendship cannot be achieved unless it is supported by the cultural understanding between people of the two countries. Here, academic cooperation is strongly required for a scientific study of society and culture.

At present, Korean studies in China is still in its infancy. Except a few Chinese scholars who were once educated in North Korea, there is virtually no one with proficient command of languages. Only a small number of scholars try to study economic development of Korea without any interest in social and cultural aspects of the country.

Many universities and research institutes now offer academic cooperation with their Korean counterparts. What they actually intend in their proposal, however, is to run a short-term special language course for Korean students but not to launch academic research of Korea among the Chinese.

On the part of Korea, Chinese studies is heavily dominated by study of Chinese language and literature, and history. But studies of literature is predominated by those of classic period like Tang and Sung. Therefore, studies of modern era is not fully attempted and socio-cultural understanding is insufficient both in terms of quality and quantity.

In Korea, popularity of Chinese studies is rapidly growing and field research is supported by public and private foundations. Also, there are various financial sources offered for Chinese students for their Korean studies in Korea. As academic exchange programmes increase, promotion of mutual understanding will be achieved in the field of social and cultural studies.

### **5. Contribution of Mass Media**

Korea is small in size and people have easy access to printed informations, for example, newspapers and journals. Since more than ten million people live in Seoul, an exhibition in Seoul is enough to disseminate information and knowledge among at least one fourth of the whole population.

But in case of China where a significant proportion of the whole population is still illiterate and newspapers are not readily available for ordinary people over the vast area, T.V. is the single most important medium to distribute knowledge about Korea directly and efficiently among the people.

Therefore, promotion of exchange and cooperation between mass media, especially T.V., between Korea and China is of fundamental importance.

### **6. Development of Tourism Industry**

One of the most effective ways to understand other society and culture is tourist experience. Actually most Koreans visiting China are tourists, and there has been a sharp increase in number. However, Korean tourist experience is limited in scope and uniform in content.

Only a few tour programmes are offered to Koreans; the most popular ones being the Beijing-Yanbian, Shanghai-Sujou-Hangjou, and Beijing-Xian-Guilin-Guangjou courses. The package tour give the Koreans the same experience through the same course of the same tour sites and cultural

attractions. With the inefficient service system, visitors are not given opportunity to enjoy life of the ordinary Chinese.

The Northeast has many places of interest to Koreans' historical consciousness but Hebei, Shangdong, Zhejiang, Yangtze River, and Yellow River also have plenty of cultural legacy and historical sites of civilization which Koreans are well aware of. Therefore, it is necessary for the Chinese part to exploit fully their cultural resources for tourism industry.

Needless to say, tourism industry is important not only as a source of national income but also as a field where foreigners experience the Chinese culture. For example, though Shandong province has many historical sites for ancient civilization and cultural tradition, they are not well developed as cultural commodity for foreigners except only a few sites like Chufu and Taishan.

In order to give tourists an opportunity to appreciate the Chinese culture in contemporary context, popular culture and recently invented cultural events and festivals need to be combined with tours to historical sites. In a word, historical pilgrimage should be related with cultural activities in contemporary context.

## **5. Case Studies**

### **Case 1.**

A Korean enterprise opened their factory in Chingdao to produce belt for industrial use. As one of the earliest venture enterprise to invest in China, it recruited local workers through the local party secretary. Soon the manager was faced with serious problem because the work pattern of the Chinese employees was much different from his experience in Korea.

In Korea, employees live in their own house at their own expense, and their living compound is separated from their work place. From 8 am (or 9 am) to 5 pm (or 6 pm) they work according to the factory's production schedule and time table. Since each worker is allocated specific role in the

assemblage production line, cooperation within the production team is vital. Therefore, work spirit and discipline is highly demanded. Hard work is always emphasized in order to achieve the planned production. Sometimes, their working hours are extended over the regular work schedule, for which they are given extra pay.

However, the Chinese employee could not meet the factory's expectation. They spend too much time for non-productive things, e.g., taking nap after lunch, and do not keep the daily working time. To the Korean manager's eyes, the Chinese workers do not make distinction between the work in factory and their private family life.

When the factory decided to dismiss some disqualified workers as a lesson, the whole Chinese employees sat in protest and even the party secretary took part in the protest. There ensued a series of harsh disputes and quarrels between the Korean manager and the party secretary. While the party secretary demanded that factory should guarantee the permanent rice bowl for its employees, the Korean manager insisted on the principle of quality control based on the capitalist market economy. Finally, the party cadre had to admit that some of the Chinese employees were to be blamed and that he was careless at the initial process of recruitment. This made the Chinese employees realize that their jobs depend upon their personal ability and achievement.

This conflict epitomizes the difference between Korean culture of business management based on the principle of market economy on the one hand and the idea of discipline in the Confucian moral codes as required to members of an organization, and the Chinese worker's socialistic custom and communal mentality.

## **Case 2**

At a medium-sized toy factory in Chingdao, a woman supervisor sent from Seoul, drilled strictly the local employees according to the Korean work place culture. But

the Chinese workers resisted her supervision by intentionally ignoring her admonition. They even refused to accept the supervisor's quality inspection of the goods they produced.

When the Korean supervisor criticized a female worker for her work attitude, the Chinese woman was simply staring at her without giving any positive response while porking her hands in jacket. To the Korean supervisor, her attitude was an act of insulting. The supervisor ordered the Chinese to pull out her hands from her pocket and answer her. As the junior worker didn't listen, the supervisor felt humiliated before the whole junior workers. In order to show off her authority as supervisor, the senior cut the pocket with scissors. The junior was outraged to pour insulting words and other Chinese workers followed her. The tension continued late in the evening.

At a workshop in Korea, junior workers are educated to follow their senior leader because the senior is assigned to supervise all the work progress on behalf of the factory. But the Chinese workers felt that the Korean woman supervisor violated the principle of equality. On the contrary, the Korean felt that the Chinese challenged the senior's authority and thus attempted a deterioration of the whole authority system which is definitely necessary for workplace management.

This case implies not only the cultural conflict but also the underlying tension based on national prejudice and ethnic antagonism between the Korean and the Chinese.

Later, the Korean supervisor criticized the Chinese in general as irresponsible, lazy, dirty, and foolish, while the Chinese women blamed the Korean staff for trying excessively to exploit and rule over them simply because they are poor. Both felt that their dignity and authority were insulted.

### **Case 3**

It is quite usual to see that in the middle of quarrels between Koreans and Chinese, the latter would shout, "You

foreigner come to China to exploit our cheap labour in order to maximize your own profit. So, why should we work hard as you demand?"

Even educated people would say, "Korea used to be subordinate to China. Now you, Koreans, are richer than we. Then you try to rule over us, which we cannot bear any more!"

By these words, Chinese would express their deep suspicion against "capitalist exploitation" and "humiliation" to their own sense of cultural superiority (It is similar to Koreans when they feel against the Japanese).

A stereotyped image of a Korean businessman is that he is an immoral capitalist demanding always more than they can do, and takes back home all the profit they make. Sometimes this reaction is encouraged by the Chinese government's protectionism against the expansion of foreign investment.

Recently, Koreans became to realize that they made many small but serious mistakes at their early stage of contact with the Chinese: They were not so sensitive about the Chinese perception and possible response to Koreans, and expressed freely their feeling and opinion about the Chinese reality, and showed off their wealth in rather exaggerated way before the "poor" Chinese. They did not try to understand the Chinese culture and general socioeconomic condition. They were completely ignorant of the Chinese administrative and bureaucratic system and demanded the Chinese counterpart act according to their own ideas and principles. As a result, they unintentionally hurt the Chinese.

## **6. Prospects**

Since there has already been such experience of conflict caused by the misunderstanding or ignorance of culture between Koreans and Chinese, acknowledgement of the importance of cultural understanding is now growing.

Because cultural understanding is the basis of political

and economic cooperative relationship among the countries in the Yellow Sea Rim, there should be more and proper cultural projects between Korea and China.

The problem is that the importance of culture and the practical use of international cultural understanding is not fully recognized by the Chinese who are too much obsessed by the pursuit of economic development. Since economic development of a country is possible only through the mutual interaction with neighbouring countries, it is necessary to build up a cultural community of the nations concerned.

Construction of a cultural community is possible when all the involved nations recognize one another as an integral part of the community as a whole. Not only the political economic situation but also the environmental problem of a country may affect the other member countries of the community. Therefore, the communal morality and ethics at the international level are required in order to overcome regional individualism, possible competition and antagonism among people of the Yellow Sea Rim.

Coastal areas of North China including Shandong are expected to play a central role in establishing the reciprocal Sino-Korean relationship and in achieving the Yellow Sea Rim Development project. Thus, the role of Shandong huachiao in Korea and Korean minorities in China is significant.