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Mr. Richard Nolte  
Executive Director  
The Institute of Current World Affairs  
535 Fifth Avenue  
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Dick:

Korea is so physically close to Japan and has been the channel through which so many aspects of Japanese culture have reached here, that a visit seemed a natural thing. We were at first surprised to learn that none of our younger (under 40) Japanese friends had ever been to Korea. They expressed no interest in doing so nor did they hold high hopes for results from our projected journey. It was, in fact, rather difficult to find material of any sort on Kankoku, as it is now called in Japan, and what did emerge failed to give any tantalizing impressions about the terrain, the people, or their culture. The few travel pamphlets are so relatively undistinguished that one begins to wonder whether there is actually nothing attractive that might serve as promotional fodder.

In desperation, Donald Albright, Tokyo American Cultural Center Director, and I approached the Korean Cultural Center in Tokyo where considerably more information was available, including Ministry of Public Information pamphlets on various subjects. This material turned out to be far better than anything else we were able to locate during our trip. Still, nothing provided lively reading and no one was seized with any special sense of anticipation. Our intention was to travel, with families, by train to Shimonoseki, the southernmost city on Japan's central island Honshu, and from there to go overnight by small boat to Pusan. Everyone concerned tried to dissuade us from the water crossing - Orientals are certain that Americans will not bear even temporary inconvenience where money can prevent it - but we persevered, and planned to proceed from Pusan north to Kyongju, then west to Taegu, and subsequently to Seoul in the northeastern part of South Korea.

The Albrights with their four children, and Karen, Erika, and I gathered early on the morning of April Fools' Day to inspect the boat that was to transport us to Korea, checked the weather forecasts carefully, and decided to try. As it turned out, the night was calm and moonlit, the air brisk, and all slept superbly. The next morning we were met by a representative of the American Cultural Center in Pusan (I was scheduled to give a lecture on "Significant Trends in American Music," a subject that left ample leeway for each to interpret the occasion to his own advantage.), and transported by carry-all over

the frequently unpaved and always jostling roads of suburban Pusan to a resort hotel on the Sea of Japan. It took some time to convince our hosts that we had something less grand and more central in mind, but soon we were on our way again to a distinctly unglamorous Korean inn a block from the Cultural Center. It was equipped with the ondol rooms which are as basic to Korean life as tatami used to be to the Japanese. The ondol floors are invariably covered with linoleum of an attractive mustard-orange color, and one sleeps almost directly on them. Beneath the surface runs a series of flues through which hot water is circulated maintaining a constant radiant heat which was, for this time of year, a little excessive. A light quilt goes on the linoleum surface and an extremely heavy quilt over the sleeper. Very firm "pillows" filled, probably, with rice husks complete the sleeping apparatus. No shoes or slippers are allowed.

Most of the day was consumed in transport, eating (at an international sailors' bar where children were quite obviously a rarity and tattoos were not), trying to find adequate tape equipment for my late afternoon lecture, and making arrangements for the coming days. I will postpone reporting on the lecture since the Pusan talk along with another in Seoul provided a very substantial counterbalance to some impressions gained in other ways. The evening was spent in reviewing our sketchy historical orientation and jotting down some impressions from the day.

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Korea has an ancient but not imposing history. By the first century A.D., three kingdoms coexisted in the peninsula which extends almost directly south from Manchuria and has a land area of approximately 85,000 square miles. (A little less than half of this is included in the Republic of Korea (ROK) where 30,000,000 South Koreans now live.) The Silla Dynasty emerged as a unifying force during the 7th century, forcing its eastern and northern competitors (Paikje and Koguryo) to capitulate by means of a continuing alliance with Tang China. The capital of the Silla empire was Kyongju, roughly comparable in import to Nara in Japan. In 918, the Unified Silla period gave way to the Koryo Empire from which the foreign name for the country was derived. This was followed in 1392 by the Yi Dynasty when General Yi Song-gye took control, substituting Confucianism for Buddhism and instituting other reforms through a bloodless coup d'état.

Throughout its history, Korea has been plagued by incessant invasion from Japan, Mongolia, and Manchuria. One of the most devastating was the Japanese invasion of 1592-98 which left the country in ashes (Korean historians point out, however, that this invasion also marked the world's first use of iron-clad ships developed by Admiral Yi Sun-sin. These are

said to have "crushed" the Japanese fleet.) The many foreign incursions resulted in the destruction of a vast majority of Korea's historical monuments, in contrast to Japan where so much was saved by the island's natural insularity. Even the Second World War thanks to the enlightened counsel of Edwin O. Reischauer left Japanese monuments and historical treasures intact. Japanese use of the peninsula during the Russian-Japanese War resulted in annexation in 1910, and to a series of stringent repressive measures. The royal family was obliged to intermarry with the Japanese Imperial Family, and an entire structure of Japanese-run schools, severely restricting the opportunities for Koreans to obtain higher education, was instituted. Elementary and vocational education were stressed and Japanese became the official language. The use of Korean in written or spoken form was actively discouraged. These factors taken together resulted in the fact that, by 1945, 78% of the adult population was illiterate. After the Second World War, the Japanese withdrawal was "facilitated" by Russian control of the North and American control of the South, the Korean War followed, and more still threatens. Not a happy picture.

Certain puzzling aspects of Korean culture are said to stem from a deliberate "cult of weakness." Writing in The Art of Korea, Evelyn McCune refers to the tactics of "withdrawal, nonaction, nonresistance, and non-interference," in defense of which the Koreans observe that "low determines high." Silence is used "as a tool of communication," and a determined lack of response may often ensue when the frustrated Westerner expects, at the very least, a minimum commitment from his Korean counterpart. This facet of Korean psychology came to mind recently when the Japanese newspapers reported a record long meeting of the UN - North Korean Military Armistice Commission in Panmunjom: 11 hours and 35 minutes. The last four hours was apparently spent in complete silence when the US Chief Negotiator refused to speak in what he considered to be a violation of normal protocol.

In Pusan, one is struck immediately by the relative rudimentaryness of life. The buildings are generally low, stucco structures completely barren of architectural grace. Windows are dirty, the streets noisy with people, and buildings that hint at a prosperous interior are festooned with bristling masses of barbed wire and sharpened metal spikes. Cars are small, poorly kept up and generally of Korean construction, though a large percentage consists of boxish black reconstructed Willys Jeeps. Trucks are rare, and even close to the center of this city of a million and a half persons loads are often moved on pony-drawn carts. Bikes are called upon to support burdens that might tax a pickup truck. I saw, for instance, a roped stack of 17 barrels over ten feet high being wheeled past our hotel. Shops display apples and, occasionally, bananas but nothing that could be construed as variety. Later, in Seoul, we saw candle-lit wagons full of bananas that were being hawked late at night in the entertainment districts. They are a sweet Taiwanese variety and expensive by Korean standards.

Apparently, friends and lovers, having had a few drinks, may grow rash enough to buy bananas as a treat during a night on the town. Wood, and bamboo in particular, was little in evidence either in its natural state or as a building material. There is, in fact, almost a complete absence of trees in the city or on the surrounding hills.

Inquiry revealed - and observations later confirmed - that over 75% of Korea has been denuded of trees. The causes are many, but at root is stubborn poverty. Timber comprises the most directly available natural resource in a depressed area. Charcoal-burning trucks were in use for decades and the Japanese developed a method of producing fuel from pine tree roots. After the 1945 liberation, there was no central authority, no ownership of the land, and the impoverished population stripped the hills bare of timber for heat and building supplies. Defoliation was also used in response to guerrilla activities and during the Korean War. The result is a staggering succession of mile after mile of almost totally bald hills and valleys, where the careful terracing cannot erase ones impression of bitter unnaturalness. Reforestation has begun, but the job is so large and financial resources so apparently limited that it seems virtually hopeless. Only small borders of pines (sol namu) possibly thirty or forty yards wide have been spared and still surround tombs and temple sites, but these are enough to indicate how luxurious the landscape might have been in better times. Need has by no means been eradicated, and I noticed that in areas where young trees had reached 6 or 7 feet in height, that all branches save those at the top have already been cut. National "Arbor Day" and organizations like the "Pine Tree Club of Pusan" have their work cut out - and may well have it cut down.

The most striking appearance is certainly made by the police and military personnel. Neatly dressed, richer in pride and authority than their fellows, they displayed none of the rough casualness that seemed to be the male norm. The women were notably more robust than their Japanese counterparts, less obviously self-deprecating or retiring in the presence of men. The Ministry of Public Information publication on education claims that Korean women enjoy now a greater degree of freedom and more opportunity for education than their sisters in other Asian countries, but this has not always been the case. In keeping with Confucian Philosophy, all but a few women were educated only in domestic matters until the beginning of this century. Now, the world's largest women's university, Ewha, is located in Seoul. In a country where a strong-minded male conservatism and an inclination for rural values has dominated for centuries, the emergence of women's education as a strong force could be particularly crucial.

As mentioned above, the Japanese occupation discouraged the use of the Korean language and finally, in 1941, banned its use altogether. Chinese ideograms were used exclusively during much

of Korea's history. At the end of the 7th century, Solch'ong invented a system of terminal syllables called idu. This device, analogous to the Japanese hiragana, served to link and amend ideograms in a way appropriate to the indigenous language. Hangul, a phonetic alphabet of 28 symbols was developed by King Sejong in 1443, during the early part of the Yi Dynasty, and this substantially widened the opportunities for education and stimulated literary activity. There were surprisingly few Chinese characters visible as we travelled, even in rural communities, though Chinese derivative words can be frequently detected in Korean conversation. On signboards and in printed matter, hangul is used almost exclusively. This made a striking contrast with Shimonoseki, our port of embarkation in southern Japan, where signboards are almost exclusively written in kanji (ideograms). We found everything vastly facilitated by the fact that almost all Koreans over 35 speak Japanese easily, though not always with pleasure. Without this, communication outside of Seoul would probably be extremely difficult for the English-speaking tourist. Very few persons outside of Seoul seem to speak even a word of English, and the Romanization of Korean words is confusing and inconsistent. On the other hand, it should be noted that, when written English is used, it is refreshingly accurate and fluent. The situation in Japan is not so happy.

The Silla Dynasty mentioned above is actually pronounced, curtly, "shira." The names of famous cities and shrines may also appear in several variants: Kyōngju, Kyungju; Sokkulam, Sokkurum, Sokkalum; Bulgok-sa, Pulkoksa; etc. It was some consolation to learn that even within the hangul system itself there is considerable variation, similar, it is said, to that prevailing in Elizabethan England. The government has recently issued standard spelling regulations for schools, but these have not yet filtered down into general use. There seem to be good prospects for standardization of the Korean language now - it is already more apparently manageable than the Japanese system which is still a *mélange* of three quite separate systems - partly as a result of growing national pride. Korean dignitaries visiting Japan are required to use interpreters even though they can all, necessarily, speak fluent Japanese.

The language, as sound, is substantially more subtle and spicy than Japanese, including 10 vowels, and 11 diphthongs as well as highly aspirate consonants. Such variety is a consistent feature of the people's temperament and their cooking as well. A curious and oft-repeated ritual took place almost every time we came into contact with ordinary Korean people. The women, whether maids, grandmothers, or waitresses, tried to physically capture our 2 year old daughter, Erika. Their actions were, of course, well intentioned, but they were not satisfied with holding, and invariably tried to carry her to some remote corner and, crouching down, to infold her - to surround her as effectively as their bulk would allow. Erika was unaccustomed to such maneuvers and it proved traumatic for everyone. This type of approach on the part of Korean women was so overt compared with anything we had come across

elsewhere in the world that it seemed highly revealing. Everyone was curious about us, and the children (all of whom are blond) in particular. As we prepared to leave the Korean Inn in Pusan, hoards of school children mobbed the entrance way for a glimpse, touched the relatively pale faces and heads, and could hardly be driven away even by energetic (characteristically), rough treatment from the hotel employees.



Erika escaping from one of her hourly, good-natured assailants. (this one in Kyungju).

Everywhere one travels in Korea, brown earthenware pots two to three feet high are in evidence. They are filled with the Korean version of miso for soup or with kimchi, the staple pickles so essential to life there. There are two varieties

of kimchi (at least): a potent, sometimes searing type for winter made from cabbage, turnips, and the Oriental radish (18 inches long by 5 or 6 in diameter, it is known as daikon in Japan), and another light, summer sort, consisting of cucumbers floating in a vinegary soup. Travelling in the spring brought us the bonus of being served both winter and summer forms, along with the five or six other supplementary dishes that can accompany their meals. The other relishes, served bold and in ample quantities, were both less strong and less appealing than the distinctive kimchi (pronounced "koom chee"). Rice, basic to the Oriental diet everywhere, is garnished in Korea with small quantities of greens and with beans (of the kidney variety), and frequently accompanied by a hot soup similar to the Japanese miso but less strongly flavored. A favorite main dish which we sampled as often as practical was bulgogi, pronounced and sometimes spelled "pulkoki." Thin slices of beef (or in other versions other meats, particularly pork) are marinated in oil, soy sauce, pepper, sugar, chopped green onion, and sesame seed, broiled over a charcoal brazier and redipped in the marinade just before eating. Cho ("chopsticks") are regulation. The hot green tea that comes at the close of such a generous meal, does little to relieve the temperature in one's mouth, and its touch can at times be almost painful, depending on how much hot pepper one's gums and tongue have been subjected to. Still, it is excellent stuff, and a welcome contrast to the bland taste of most Japanese foods.

Contrasts with Japanese life were, of course, the most noticeable for us. It seemed almost unnatural not to see the incessant bobbing of heads that bowing occasions, and certainly surprising to find sandbagged bunkers in front of official buildings in Pusan. It is unlikely that guerrillas could realistically be expected to penetrate so far south, and one wonders for whose benefit they were constructed. Traditional dress looks to be dying out in Korea as well as Japan, and one rarely finds men in their baggy, bloused trousers. Only twice did I see the extraordinary traditional hat, a broad-brimmed, black construction not unlike the brimmed cap that Vatican residents sometimes wear, but equipped as well with a Quaker-Oats-box-shaped cylinder over the crown, and all made from a semi-transparent, stiff, black net. The chogori are worn in approximately the same proportion that Japanese women still wear kimono (more in rural areas), but the Korean costume - short, close-fitting jackets with vividly-colored, long, flowing skirts - is far more attractive. It allows and probably has promoted a more free mode of movement as compared with the restrictive wrappings of the kimono, and functions far more as an addition to the landscape than as a component.

As mentioned at the outset, we had been unable to find attractive material on Korean arts at the Cultural Center in Tokyo and at bookshops. The situation was not much improved in Pusan or even in Seoul. We left for Kyungju still in doubt as to what, if anything, we would find of absorbing interest, but the country-side was immediately captivating. It contrasted diametrically with impressions collected in Pusan. Houses

were straw-thatched and warmly, though not brightly, colored. Each dwelling appeared to be a complex of buildings fronting on a neatly swept courtyard or madang. Organization and pride was apparent not only in the uncluttered building complexes but in the geometric elegance of the terraced rice fields. It was a bracing ride that raised our spirits and expectations for the following days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roger Reynolds', written in a cursive style.

Roger Reynolds

Received in New York April 24, 1969.