

# Behind the Headlines: Ambassadors for Peace in North Korea



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**W**HEN considering the history of exchanges between the two Koreas, October 19, 2002 is a day that will be remembered for a long time, because it was the historic day on which South Korean civilians traveled to Pyongyang for the purpose of tourism for the first time since the partition of Korea into North and South. In three trips with groups of a hundred each, three hundred leaders working for North-South unification—some two thirds of whom were IIFWP Ambassadors for Peace—toured Jeongju, Mt. Myohyang, Nampo and Pyongyang in tours we called Pyeonghwa Motors Company observation parties.

We wanted a name that would differentiate us from the Hyundai group tours to Mt. Keumgang. The name also indicates the fact that among the companies with projects in North Korea, Pyeonghwa Motors has been the most successful at carrying out business. In a 70/30 joint venture deal with the Ryonbong Company of North Korea, Pyeonghwa Motors is importing parts for an Italian compact-sized car, the Siena, to their production plant in Nampo, where the cars are manufactured through the complete knock-down (CKD) method.<sup>1</sup> Sales of the finished product, *Hwiparam* ("Whistling"), are expected to be very good.

The schedule was tight; the trips lasted just five days. The itinerary for the groups included visiting various sites in

Pyongyang, the site for the peace park in Jeongju, the International Friendship Exhibition Hall near Mt. Myohyang and then the Pyeonghwa Motors Assembly Plant in Nampo. The Mt. Keumgang Tours conducted by Hyundai simply take people from the South on a tour of Mt. Keumgang. When we take into consideration that the first general condition for traveling to a place is meeting local residents and having some experience of their daily lifestyle, it is not quite accurate to say those who have been on the Mt. Keumgang tours have really visited North Korea. The Mt. Keumgang tours fall far short of the usual meaning of travel to another land.

For whatever reason, the North Korean authorities are adopting a more open-door policy to overcome their recent severe economic crisis. The fact that they have permitted their southern counterparts to tour Pyongyang shows that they are going all out in preparing an epoch-making means of boosting their relationships with the South and West, including America.<sup>2</sup> They seem to have taken great pains over this pro-

ject in lifting a total ban on the South. They had not looked into the possibility of such a project and, after throwing open the door, they initially held up the project on the grounds of high structural costs. Apparently, they have now decided to fully implement it. We must not overlook the fact that they have



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selected the Federation for World Peace (FWP) as the organization in which they can put the most trust and confidence.

Father visited the North in December 1991, and had a private talk with Chairman Kim Il-sung. At that time Father went by his title of President of the Federation for World Peace, and that is how he is referred to today in North Korea. For the past eleven years, since his visit to the North, the FWP has been doing well in managing the Potonggang Hotel, taking on the running of Pyeonghwa Motors and conducting tours for thousands of members from Japan and other countries who feel called to make the pilgrimage to the holy ground [the house where Father was born]. FWP has built up a robust reputation of maintaining a standard beyond that of other organizations.

I first visited North Korea in 1994 and have visited there more than ten times since. I was therefore asked to lead each of the three groups that went up as observation teams. I was put in a position where I felt I could maximize the satisfaction of both the

North Korean government—which was flinging open its doors to outsiders for the first time in fifty years—and the South Korean sightseers, who would finally set foot in the unknown land they have long desired to visit but have been unable to.

It would be correct to say that no one visiting North Korea for the first time does so without feeling some tension at the outset. The preconceptions built up over the more than half a century over which the peninsula has been partitioned, and the strangeness that can be acutely felt the moment one steps on the Koryo Airlines plane

at Shenyang Airport, China, bound for North Korea are a natural consequence of the psychological effect derived from one's curiosity, fear, even hostility, toward—and yet intimacy with—the communist North.

Soonan Airport in Pyongyang can be likened to a country bus station, secluded and gloomy. One can immediately sense the difficult economic situation facing North Korea. Still, it is hard to understand why the airport, which is the gateway to the nation, is left as it is. As I have made many trips to North Korea, I can objectively testify to the development and gradual changes taking place in the society, but the airport is the one place that remains unchanged. Putting all the past and present facts together, I cannot help but have an eerie feeling that it is kept that way for some strategic purpose.

As soon as we boarded the coach bus heading for the Potonggang Hotel, a [North Korean] guide from Mt. Keumgang Travel warmly greeted us, since we were the first group of tourists to visit Pyongyang from the South since Korea's division. Our tensions and fears were allayed the moment we heard the guide's kindly voice. We are in fact one nation and one brotherhood if we put aside differences in ideologies and systems.

The Potonggang Hotel is not a very large hotel. It has about 160 guest rooms. After True Father's visit, our church purchased the hotel and took over its management. Satellite TV antennas were installed, facilities were repaired and the implementation of Western management techniques began. For the past decade, the hotel has been so successful that it has become an object of envy of the other hotels in North Korea. When the observation party arrived, we were welcomed with warm applause by members of the hotel staff, all of whom were standing in a line at the entrance. Their warm reception, coupled with the unexpectedly bright and cosy environment, made every one of us feel relieved, comfortable and at home.

Under the supervision of Park Sang-kwon, president of Pyeonghwa Motors and Pang Jong-sam, president of Mt. Keumgang Travel, who was our local guide, the reception dinner was held in a peaceful atmosphere. The food was so delicious and plentiful that we were left wondering if food really was scarce in North Korea.

The second day found us visiting the site for a World Peace Park at Won-



**Photos:** facing page top, one of the three groups in front of the Potonggang Hotel, on the construction site for our World Peace Center; middle, on the Pyongyang subway train; bottom, (from left) Mr. Cho Sung-nak, Rev. Hwang Sun-jo and Citizen's Federation Chairman Rev. Yoo Chong-kwan in front of a Pyongyang subway station (April 2002); this page top, Cho Sung-nak speaks with North Korean cabinet minister Jeon Keum-jin (1999); middle, a round of golf in North Korea: present along with some North Korean dignitaries are (left) Cho Sung-nak and (fourth from left) Moon Yong-hyun, cousin of True Father and then president of the Tongil Group, plus lady caddies; directly above, Mr. Cho at the main festival of the national 87th birthday celebration for Kim Il-sung, some five years after his death.



*Visiting the Chang-gwang Kindergarten in Pyongyang*

scape on the return journey reminded us of typical farm villages, all too familiar to us back home. It being harvest time, the sheaves of rice in every paddy field were standing uniformly in rows, and farmers were loading vegetables, such as cabbages and turnips, onto bicycle carts. As I watched my fellow Koreans sweating and toiling for a living in the tough environment, I was deeply touched with compas-

sion.

It seems to me the North Korean authorities, owing to a strong sense of self-respect, will never disclose the truth about the harsh lives of their people to outsiders, even today. From the fact that they specially made an exception of our observation team, one can guess at the degree of trust they have in the Federation for World Peace.

The house in which Father was born is shabby-looking at first sight. We were amazed that the authorities had not totally demolished it. They have preserved what was still standing. As

Father is well known as the leader of the international Victory over Communism (VOC) movement, he is supposed to be their bitterest enemy. We could not believe this was happening.

We spent the third day touring Mt. Myohyang and downtown Pyongyang. Mt. Myohyang is famous for its International Friendship Exhibition Hall and the Bohyeon Temple. The International Friendship Exhibition Hall is built inside a cave carefully dug out of the foot of the mountain. It is divided into the Hall of Chairman Kim Il-sung (50,000m<sup>2</sup>) and the Hall of the National Defense Committee Chairman Kim Jong-il. Together they display a total of over 210,000 types of rare and valuable gifts given by some of the world's presidents, political parties, social organizations, company presidents and overseas Koreans. Our tour guide explained, "Most of the exhibits in the museums in France and the United Kingdom were plundered from foreign countries, but all the displays you see here are without exception gifts contributed by people who hold Chairman Kim Il-sung and National Defense Committee Chairman Kim Jong-il in high esteem." When I heard that, I tended to agree with the guide, but when I stared at the splendor of the large-scale building, the

*Leaders of the Family Federation and other providential organizations at the birthplace of Kim Il-sung. This is one of the major sites visitors from other countries are brought to see.*



image of my suffering countrymen haunted me. I could only console myself with the thought that this would not be possible were there no absolute power, and that these artifacts will at least have some value from a historical point of view.

The Bohyeon Temple is famous as the place where the Buddhist monk Seosan led an ascetic and monastic life. I was exceedingly impressed at the way the temple facilities are maintained, and that even an original version of the Korean Buddhist scripture *Palman dae-Janggyeong* printed on paper from the wood printing blocks housed in the Haein Temple in South Korea is being carefully kept.<sup>3</sup> After the trip, we had lunch at the Hyangsang Hotel at the entrance to the mountain park. The taste of the food seemed an unforgettable memory.

As a means of propaganda, the North Korean authorities took us to (among others) the *Juche Sasang* [ideology of self-sufficiency] Tower,<sup>4</sup> King Dongmyeong's royal tomb,<sup>5</sup> the Changgwang Kindergarten,<sup>6</sup> for a ride on the Pyongyang subway, and Chairman Kim Il-sung's hometown and place of birth, Mangyeong. We could easily see the point they were trying to drive home. After that, we ate cold noodles at the

famous Okryu Restaurant,<sup>7</sup> followed a path up to the Moran Peak and reached the Ulmil Plateau. As I bent and looked down on the beautiful Daedong River, I meditated on my desire for unification, telling myself, "How nice it would be if the unification process could be hastened, and many more of my compatriots from the South could freely travel to Pyongyang to enjoy cold noodles at Okryu Restaurant and climb the Moran Peak."

The Pyeonghwa Motors Assembly Plant stands proudly on a large plot of land one million square meters in size at the end of the ten-lane divided highway, the Young Hero Expressway, that stretches from Pyongyang to Nampo. It takes approximately

thirty minutes by bus from Pyongyang. A billboard with Pyeonghwa Motors Assembly Plant [in Hangul] in large letters can easily be spotted on the side of the road.

The sturdy factory was built with the latest construction methods and equipped with modern production facilities. As I saw several dozen cars lined up in the warehouse, waiting to be delivered, a thousand emotions welled up in me, for I had been involved in setting up this enterprise in its early stages.

On the bus returning from Pyongyang, Park Sang-kwon confidently remarked that if those cars crossed the 38th parallel overland, Pyeonghwa Motors will have fulfilled its role of unifying the two Koreas in both name and reality. I dwelt on his words in my mind and prayed fervently for the success of the automobile project. Through my experience, I know without a doubt that its success will pave the way for smoothly advancing the unification of North and South, which is our long-awaited, cherished hope.

The traveling expenses to Pyongyang and back were high, although it is merely 240 kilometers from Seoul. Prior to making the trip, when I thought of our observation team traveling around that land for a few days, I felt upset and thought that it would be a waste of money.

However, when we met our brothers in the North face-to-face and shook their hands, ate and chatted with them, I found that we could communicate with one another heart-to-heart. What philosophy and system on earth could have caused the pain of separation that we feel to this day? My heart was all pent up with rage and I was at a loss for words. I now see being able to take three hundred leaders of the North-South unification movement to Pyongyang and back as a miracle, and so I have new hope. When I compare the reality of today's North Korea with the time I first went to Pyongyang in 1994, I can actually sense a transformation that is beyond my imagination. If this trend continues, I am certain that

the day of unification is not far away.◆

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Product is assembled from basic components.

<sup>2</sup> This account was written before the present difficulties over nuclear facilities emerged.

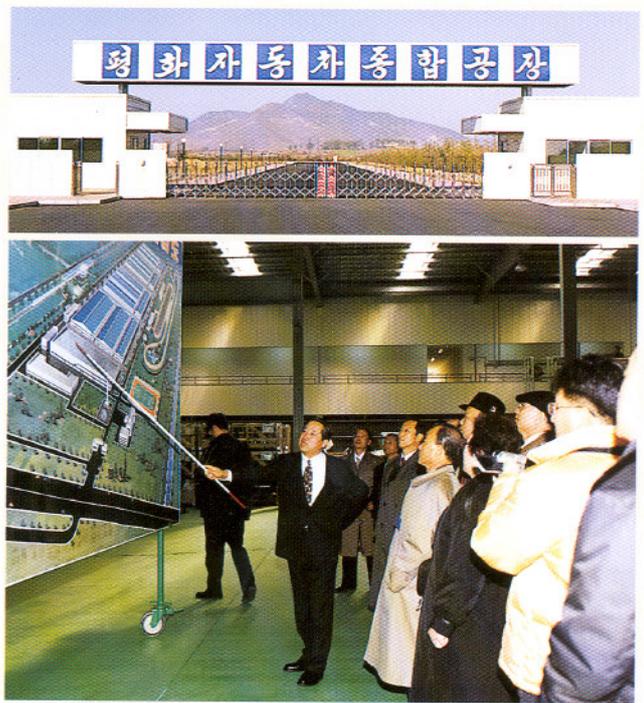
<sup>3</sup> The wooden printing plates housed in the Haein Temple (South Korea) were made in the 13th century. The plates contain 52 million characters.

<sup>4</sup> 150-meter high tower topped by 20-meter high flame opened in 1982 on Kim Il-sung's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>5</sup> King Dongmyeong founded Koguryo in 277 BC. The tomb was built in the 5th century and moved when Koguryo transferred its capital to Pyongyang.

<sup>6</sup> The same kindergarten that first lady Lee Hui-ho of South Korea was taken to on the occasion of the first ever summit between North and South Korean heads of state.

<sup>7</sup> Its 11,500 square meters of floor space can accommodate 3,000 diners.



**Top, the entrance to the Pyeonghwa Motors Assembly Plant; above, Park Sang-gwon, president of Pyeonghwa Motors, explaining the plant to the visiting leaders and Ambassadors for Peace**



**Mr. Cho looks over the Daedong River from the Okryu Restaurant**

