

Interview of Sun Moon University Professor Myung-chul Cho

Seog Byung Kim

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Question: Professor Cho, I would like to ask you about your experience in North Korea, teaching at Kim Il Sung University.

I received my doctorate from Kim Il Sung University in October 1987 and that same month I was appointed instructor in the Department of Economics, in North Korea we all received an appointment from the Party.

Question: You weren't born in South Korea.

No, I was born in North Korea, in Pyongyang, in a district called Man Gyeong Dae, the district where Kim Jong-un's grandfather was born; that's where I was also born.

Question: Does that give you a certain prestige in North Korea?

No, we are all considered equal citizens of Pyongyang. Man Gyeong Dae belonged to Daedong County, South Pyeong-an Province, and was then annexed (to Pyongyang).

Question: When did you come to South Korea?

I came on July 18, 1994. I arrived that day.

Question: Could you tell us how you came here?

Yes, as a professor at Kim Il Sung University, in 1992 I had to go to a training course in China. I was in China for two years, one year in Beijing and one year at Chongjin Namgae University. In 1994, several dynamic events took place, including the death of Kim Il Sung. Leader Kim Il Sung died on July 8 and as I recall I left Beijing on July 10 for Hong Kong and from there I came here.

Question: I remember that when Kim Il Sung died many people were crying, many were moved. Having been a student at Kim Il Sung University, it can be said that you were part of an elite and it is interesting that while others were crying, you were leaving the country.

At that time I entered the (North Korean) Embassy in Beijing the interior of the embassy was convulsed; there was grief and tears were heard; I also went there to give my condolences and yes, in the midst of that environment one became infected and tears flowed from our eyes, it was a group psychological effect as everyone cried. Another cause may be that I had been brainwashed myself; in fact, I shed many tears.

In fact, the present Foreign Affairs Minister Ri Yong-ho and Choi Sunhui, (Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs) who recently went along with Kim Jong-un to Vietnam and Russia, were my classmates at Namsan High School in Pyongyang, a school attended only by children of ministers and vice-ministers. There we graduated together. At that time Ri Yong-ho's father was the private secretary of Kim Jong-Il, while Chi Sun-hui's father was the private secretary of Kim Il-sung.



Pyongyang, capital of North Korea

Question: Then, something must have changed in your mind, in your heart.

It's a topic that gives me enough time to talk to my students for a whole semester, because there's a lot to say, but from my perspective, the North Korean regime has a lot of problems. Really, there is no freedom, there is no freedom for the individual, a lot of repression in different aspects, things that you have to live with while inside North Korea, but when you go out and meet people from all over the world you wonder how you endured so much; it was really very difficult (life there). To give you just one example, which I don't know if you can understand. As I told you, I spent two years abroad. That's when Sol arrived, the first day of the lunar calendar year, and you're on school holidays. The Chinese and foreign students who studied with me, there were also Americans, Colombians, Pakistanis, from several countries in the same classroom. As it was the first day of the year, everyone went to have fun or went home. We had to learn the whole speech of Kim Il Sung on the first day of the new year and then, on the third and fifth days, pass an exam (from Kim Il Sung's speech). The whole thing had to be memorized; we couldn't go anywhere. On New Year's Day! Is there another country like this (in the world)?

Question: One final question. What is your impression of your South Korean students?

Not just the Sun Moon people, but all South Koreans in general, I really envy them! Don't they enjoy a freedom that they can enjoy just because they were born here? Is anyone going to control them? They couldn't be happier if they were born in a natural state, in a country like South Korea, because they get freedom. Isn't that right? But even though the North Koreans did not commit any sin, just because they were born in North Korea, unlike the South Koreans, they are oppressed. I always emphasize to the students how important freedom is. I envy them myself; not just me, my whole family could have been happier. I talk about it often. I always tell students that we must build a future in which North Koreans can be as happy as you are, a future in which all citizens of North Korea and South Korea can grow and live well together. I tell you, that is the task and the obligation that they have.