

My Summer at Yanbian University

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Self-Introduction by the Author

I was born in 1929, the eldest of seven children. The town, Myungryung-dong, where I was born and grew up until the Korean War broke out had been known as center of Confucius Learning and education surrounded by Seoul National University (formerly Keijo Imperial University) and several colleges.



I graduated from the Engineering College of Seoul National University in 1954 and left Korea for United States to pursue advance degrees in Materials Science and Engineering. At North Carolina State University I received another BS degree in Ceramic Engineering and MS degree in Materials Science and Engineering in 1956 and 1958, respectively. I pursued an advanced degree at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, in the fall of 1958, and received a Ph.D. in Materials Science and Engineering in June 1961.

My original intention was to then return to Korea and become involved in the reconstruction of Korea. However, I was advised to acquire practical experience in advanced technology instead. I spent the next nearly 30 years working at AT&T Bell Telephone Laboratories, which, at the time had a reputation as one of the best R&D companies in the world. I retired as Distinguished Technical Member of Staff in 1990 after spending time working on research related to Electro-Magnetic-Optic (EMO) components for telecommunication systems. I visited Korea regularly over the years to lecture at several Korean research institutes on advanced technical developments.

In 1990, the opportunity came to return to Korea at the invitation from Pohang University of Science and Technology (POSTECH), where I had dual appointments; teaching as a professor at POSTECH, and a vice president of Advanced Materials Development Division at Research Institute of Science and Technology (RIST). It was a rewarding and satisfying experience that I enjoyed until I officially retired as Professor Emeritus in 2000. I have been professionally active with part time teaching locally as well as participating in technical societies and Korean Scientists and Engineers Association in USA (KSEA) programs since my repatriation. Recently, I became an adjunct professor at YUST (July 24, 2005).

My wife of 48 years, Dr. Kyu Sun Lee, is a former physician. We have three children (2 boys and girl) and five grandchildren.

The report that follows is from my experience during the summer of 2005 when I was invited to teach a summer session at the Yanbian University of Science and Technology (YUST). This was my first trip to Manchuria and to interact with the Koreans in China.

My Summer at Yanbian University

This past summer, I was invited to teach an upper level class in Engineering at Yanbian University of Science & Technology (YUST) in Yanbian, China. One of the highlights of the trip was learning about the Chosunjock (Ethnic Koreans living in China), their culture and their future in Yanbian, China.



Main Building at YUST

The Yanbian district in Jilin province has a primarily Chinese (Hanjock) population of about 2.2 million. The Korean-Chinese are in the minority with a population of approximately 836,000 or 38%. It is in this district that a Korean Christian group in South Korea financed the establishment of YUST in 1992. The philosophy and goal of the university is to position its graduates to provide the necessary manpower for a developing industrial nation. The president of the university proclaimed that in order to improve the well-being of Chosunjock who live in China, the younger generation must be educated so that they can move from agrarian to industrial life.

To that end, YUST recruited most of its 200 full or part time faculty members (mostly volunteers), who are retired professors, from South Korea, USA and Canada. YUST has about 2000 alumni who are all actively engaged in industrial occupations throughout China. This June, of the 300 graduates, 80% are working in industry and 20% are going abroad for

advanced degrees. In addition to the regular faculty, volunteers from Christian communities in South Korea, USA, and Canada, contribute in various classes, including Christianity, during the summer. There are twelve curricula, of which language, computer science and business administration are in the most demand. I was interested to learn that the language department teaches English and German taken by Korean-Chinese (Chosunjock), Chinese taken by Koreans, Korean taken by Chinese (Hanjock). In fact, old generation speaks Korean with Yanbian accent and Chinese while young generation speaks three languages (Korean, Chinese and English or German). I also observed that Christianity is strongly emphasized and encouraged despite being in a socialistic country.



Chapel service at YUST

YUST is a well-regarded university given its successful alumni and its ability to recruit knowledgeable and experienced faculty. The current student body of approximately 1700 students was recruited from throughout the Yanbian district and was selectively admitted through SAT test scores. I found my students eager to learn and energetic. For example, some of them were taking as many as three courses during the summer session. They had a strong conviction that their success through education should be used to better the lives of those people less fortunate than themselves. They also yearned for religious freedom.

During my visit, I had the opportunity to visit six historical sites, including Beakdu mountain (Chunji). Beakdu Mountain is located along the border between China and North Korea. Because the Du-Mang River is so close to North Korea, I was able to see into North Korea. I observed vastly different scenery along the river: The China side is active with crowds of people, while the North Korean side is so deserted as if no one exists. I also visited the memorial sites of patriot, Ahn, Joong kuen and poet, Yoon, Chang-Ho. I was strongly compelled to respect Korea patriotic ancestors, who scarified their lives for Korean independency from Japan even in remote country, like Yanbian.

While my time was primarily spent teaching at the University, I had the opportunity to interview both older and young generations of Chosunjock. In the conversations, I got

strong impression that the older generation had emphasized the importance of helping their own people upon their children. Although a minority population living in China, the Chosunjock hold onto their heritage with great pride. The economic future looks bright for the Chosunjock as they enjoy material advances made available through modern technology; however, their political future remains uncertain as a minority in China. Now, I felt fulfilled by this unique opportunity to learn about another culture and to take part of an exciting development in the lives of the younger generation of the Chosunjock.



A border village of North Korea across Tumen river