

Opening Remarks

Sang-Woo Rhee

Dr. Batbayar, distinguished scholars and leaders of the various sectors of Mongolia and Korea, and ladies and gentlemen! It is great honor for me to make opening remarks at the first Mongolian-Korean Academic Conference.

Mongolia and Korea had been separated for more than seven hundred years until last year when both nations normalized diplomatic relation and established foreign missions in other's capital. Despite of such a long separation, both nations are drawing to each other in an amazing pace. It seems to me that it is possible because of the ethnical affinity and cultural similarity between the two peoples. Mogolians regard Solongos-hun as their ethnic relatives, and Koreans share the same feeling toward Mongolians. No other nations can develop such close feeling in less than one year since the first contact started. I value this peculiar relation between the two nations, and I believe that on the basis of this special psychological foundation, we can easily build up various cooperative relations.

Mongolia has been very special nation to me from my childhood. To this regard, let me tell you my personal experience. When I was young, my nation, Korea, was a very poor, war-shattered nation. In the 1950s, not only Korea but also all of the Asian nations were in the similar situation. In the misery naturally the Korean youngsters including myself were deeply depressed spiritually, since we could not envision bright future in the foreseeable future. To get some psychological comfort, I digged into old history of our proud past. As you are well aware of, our ancestors once prospered in the vast Manchurian prairie. From time to time they fought with Chinese to keep national integrity and pride. At that time one day I came across to find some books on the Mongolian history including heroic stories

of Gingham Khan. By reading them I began to realize that we, the Mongoloids, once ruled virtually all over the world, and subjugated caucasians under us, I was greatly encouraged and I got belief that someday we could rebuild proud Korea and Asia again. Courageous history of the Mongolian people help the whole Asians get rid of racial complex vis-a-vis the Europeans. In that sense I am spiritually indebted greatly to the Mongolians.

Mongolians are regarded as a very proud and courageous people. "Men of dignity" is the general perception of Mongolians shared by ordinary Koreans. And this is the very image of Mongolians that draws respects and admiration by foreigners.

Today and tomorrow we will discuss on the various measures to promote cooperation between Mongolia and Korea. We will also discuss on the possible joint endeavors to enhance regional peace and prosperity in East Asia. From Korean side, Honorable Cho Soon-sung, Member of National Assembly, will deliver his design of regional peace system in East Asia, professor Kim Soo-yong will present a paper on economic cooperation between Mongolia and Korea, And Professor Yu Jae-Cheon will deal with cultural exchanges and cooperation between the two nations.

This conference is just a start of our conversations to be followed in the years to come. I hope this meeting of the intellectuals of the two nations will be a fruitful arena where we can frankly exchange our views on the matters of mutual concerns.

Thank you for your attention.