

**SGI President Honored In So. Korea Visit
Courtesy of SGI NEWSLETTER
Seoul, Korea**

Yun Shinha started his practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1963. Two years later, he was arrested and imprisoned for 58 days because of his religious beliefs. But he never gave up.

Persecution of Soka Gakkai members in Korea was common in those days: meetings were under surveillance and often broken up by the police; members were interrogated about what was perceived to be a Japanese religion; police overturned altars and arrested members for "anti-government activities."

Korean members could not openly enshrine or pray to the Gohonzon in their homes and were forced to conceal them inside cupboards or walls. They were shunned and even harassed by neighbors and co-workers who knew of their beliefs. Such persecution continued through much of the '80s.

Antagonism toward the Soka Gakkai and its followers stemmed from Korea's widespread hatred of Japan, a legacy of Japan's occupation of the Korean peninsula (1910–45). Even today, South Korea prohibits the import of Japanese films, videos, pop music and cartoons unless they are deemed to have educational merit. And recent polls indicate that more than 80 percent of Koreans oppose opening up the country to Japanese culture.

In that context, the significance of SGI President Ikeda's 1990 visit becomes clear. (As founder of the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, President Ikeda attended the exhibit opening of "Masterpieces of European Oil Paintings" in Seoul, co-sponsored by the Tokyo museum.) It was, in fact, one of President Ikeda's first visits to that nation.

Since then, the KSGI launched civic-minded activities, such as its environmental clean-up campaigns for which the organization has been commended. And over the past year, the SGI president and the KSGI have received numerous acknowledgments from local governments.

During President Ikeda's recent visit, the accolades continued. Many cited his pioneering efforts toward better relations between Korea and Japan and lauded his willingness to acknowledge Japan's culpability during its years of occupation. Highlights of his visit included:

- May 5: President Ikeda was awarded a Plaque of Commendation from the city of Kwangju, citing his efforts to oppose militarism and nuclear testing. It is the first time Kwangju has honored any individual.

- May 7: President Ikeda was honored with a Plaque of Commendation from the city of Koyang, near Seoul.

- May 15: SGI President Ikeda, founder of Soka University, received an honorary doctorate in philosophy from Kyung Hee University in Seoul. The event was followed by a dinner hosted by the university, during which Chancellor Choue Young Seek described his hope that the strengthened ties between Soka University and Kyung Hee University would contribute to improved relations between their two nations.

- May 16: The Global Cooperation for a Brighter Society (GCS) Club International conferred its Emerald Award on Kaneko Ikeda, citing her contributions to the betterment of society. Mrs. Ikeda is the 10th recipient of this award from GCS, a cultural and humanitarian nongovernmental group that promotes the Brighter Society Movement in 30 different countries.

- May 17: President Ikeda hosted a dinner in Seoul to repay the hospitality they received during their Korean visit, and to celebrate Kyung Hee University's 49th anniversary.

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- May 18: Kyongsangbuk Province conferred a Certificate of Commendation upon President Ikeda in recognition of his commitment to human rights and world peace.

- May 18: President Ikeda visited the KSGI headquarters in Seoul for the very first time and met with Korean representatives.

It was at this meeting that he noticed a white-haired gentleman — Mr. Yun Shinha, who is now a KSGI guidance counselor after 35 years of practice in Korea. “I appoint you ‘SGI president’ for a day,” President Ikeda said as delighted smiles filled the room.

Compiled by LISA KIRK, assistant managing editor

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