

Remembering the Start of Exchanges between North and South Korean Women

Kim Yun-ok

Former Co-Director, Women Making Peace*

Heading Back in Time

For the first time in history, the North Korean women's national team crossed the land border separating the two Koreas on its way to Seoul on November 24, 1991. On September 1, 1992, the South Korean national women's team crossed the land border on its way to Pyongyang. My story here to the younger generation about the women who succeeded in bringing together North and South Korea – something the two country's men failed to do – is out of hope that the women's peace movement to achieve peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula will continue.

Yi Hyo-jae, who passed away years ago, brought life to the women's movement while theorizing the “sociology of division,” and Yi U-chōng, who passed away 10 years ago, led the women's movement while at the center of the 1970s South Korean democratization movement. Both women served as the chairwomen of the Federation of Women's Associations. Yō Yōn-ku, the enthusiastic head of the North Korean delegation, is also no longer with us. Then there is also Shimizu Sumiko, a member of the Upper House of the Japanese National Diet, who created opportunities over four years for historical meetings between North and South Korean women; Mutsuko Miki, the wife of retired Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Miki; and Doi Takako, the former head of the Japan Socialist Party. All of these women have left us. I sincerely hope they rest in peace.

* Instead of the regular interview format, in this issue we feature a translation of Kim Yun-ok's "Remembering the Start of Exchanges between North and South Korean Women" originally appeared in *Yōsōnggwa pyōnghwa* (Women and Peace) in January 2022 (Vol. 7), a non-periodical publication of the Institute of Korean Women's Peace, an affiliate research institution of Women Making Peace.

In October 1987, I ended my 13 years of study in Germany and headed home. The most memorable things I witnessed while in Germany were the efforts by Germans to overcome the division between East and West Germany, and the fiercely peaceful demonstration that occupied a highway to oppose the US deployment of a Pershing II weapons system. During this demonstration, the huge crowd of demonstrators that surrounded the US and Soviet embassies stretched out to clog up Germany's famous Autobahn, and the feelings I experienced while participating in that demonstration had an enormous impact on me.

Another memorable time I had in Germany was at the Institute for Peace at Heidelberg University. The university was the first I registered for and is where I met Wolfgang Huber. As I learned from him about the operations of the Institute for Peace and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), I learned, for the first time, the concept of peace. I was captivated by the thought that efforts to overcome the division of the Korean Peninsula should mirror those efforts being made in divided Germany, and that there is a need for women to be involved in working for peace. When asked by Pastor Weissinger what I wanted to do after returning to Korea, I responded that I wanted to create a women's peace institute to form bonds between women working to overcome Korea's division. That is how I received support from German churches to create the Christian Women's Peace Institute in February 1989. The chairwoman of the institute was my teacher, Professor Yi U-chöng, while Professor Yi Hyo-jae and Professor Pak Sun-kyöng served as board members.

Over a period of eight years, I served as the institute's director and focused my time on conducting peace research from a gender perspective while cultivating young researchers. Many peace researchers have followed in my footsteps to continue the institute's work. Now, the institute has taken off "Christian" from its name to encourage broader participation, and is a research institute under the auspices of the organization Women Making Peace. The predecessor to the Women Making Peace is the Executive Committee for the Seoul Discussion Forum and the Pyongyang Discussion

Forum. When President Kim Il-sung suddenly died in April 1994, inter-Korean relations became strained, and we were no longer able to continue our exchanges. Consequently, the South Korean Executive Committee broke off on its own and the organization Women for Peace was formed as a way to move forward with the women's peace movement. The organization began its activities in the borrowed office of the Women's Peace Institute.

The Start of Women's Exchanges between North and South

The starting place for the Seoul Discussion Forum, which was held in 1991 and marked the historical opening of the gates to civilian exchanges between the two Koreas, was Yi U-chŏng's participation in a peaceful protest on the day commemorating the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima in Japan. Shimizu Sumiko, a Japan Socialist Party lawmaker in the Upper House of the National Diet—whose writing can be found on page 29 of the First Tokyo Discussion Forum report—hosted the event. In summary, she writes that she met South Korean representative Yi U-chŏng four years prior in Hiroshima. Yi told her that she did not know how North Koreans were living because people from the two Koreas had not met for 46 years, and because of the division, she (also) had no idea how the families of divided families were living in Kaesŏng and whether or not they were still alive.

Japanese people travel to both North and South Korea without any apology or compensation for Japan's colonial-era transgressions toward Korea. Believing that what the Japanese need to do is help encourage reconciliation between and unification of the two Koreas, Shimizu Sumiko arranged meetings between North and South Korean representatives in Tokyo, leading to the symposium on “Peace in Asia and the Role of Women” over the course of four years.

The First Symposium: “Peace in Asia and the Role of Women”

This symposium was held in Tokyo from May 31 to June 2, 1991. The participants included women from both Koreas, Japanese women, and Korean-Japanese women. Out of the participants, 450 met in Tokyo while another 430 met in Kobe. Three professors from South Korea attended the event, including: Yi U-chōng, National Assemblywoman, former chairwoman of the Church Women’s Federation, and the first chairwoman of the Federation of Women’s Associations; Yi Hyo-jae, professor of social sciences at Ewha Womans University and the second chairwoman of the Federation of Women’s Associations; and Yun Jung-ok, professor at Ewha Womans University and joint director of the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, which brought to light the issue of the Japanese military’s sexual slavery. The participants from North Korea included Yō Yōn-ku, who served as chief representative of the North Korean delegation and was vice-chairwoman of the Supreme People’s Assembly; Chōng Myōng-sun, from the Unification Issue Research Institute; and Yi Ryōn-hwa of the North Korean Foreign Culture Liaison Committee.

During the first part of the conference, panelists from each country appealed to their counterparts on various issues. Professor Yi Hyo-jae appealed for cooperation to overcome division. She did not focus on the historical origins of Korea’s tragic division or who was at fault; instead, she appealed for peace and reconciliation to overcome the difficulties and pain that ordinary people have experienced while living within the shackles of a divided society, especially focusing on the pain suffered by many women due to the political and ideological confrontation and the loss of husbands or children during Korea’s division and the Korean War. Yi also mentioned the women’s movement and the efforts toward peaceful unification by those wanting to liberate themselves from the painful shackles of division. She further appealed for Japanese women to join forces with South Korean women to fight for reduction in military expenditures by pushing for welfare policies that reduce growing military costs.

Yŏ Yŏn-ku, the head of the North Korean delegation, said that the issue of peace should not be handed over to men and that women should join forces to bring peace throughout Asia. She further called for the Korean Peninsula to turn into a nuclear-free zone. Yŏ said that having American troops stationed in Japan and South Korea would be a dangerous trigger for war and, as such, Asia must be a place without nuclear weapons and American troops. She appealed for opposition to the deployment of American nuclear weapons, calling for their removal and concrete steps to ensure the implementation of a non-aggression pact between the two Koreas.

Rep. Shimizu Sumiko remarked that Japan's responsibility (for Korea's division) weighed heavily on her mind, and that Japan must deeply reflect on the violence and criminality inherent in Japan's colonization of Korea. She argued that Japanese people must reflect on their part in Japan's invasion of Korea, and that her country must teach the proper version of history along with making due apology and compensation to Korea. Yun Chŏng-ok, for her part, demanded that Japan acknowledge the Japanese military's sexual slavery, and testified that between 100,000 to 200,000 young Korean girls were forcibly dragged off to serve as sex workers for Japanese soldiers. She further said that after the end of World War Two, they were abandoned and even shot to death in battlefields. Yun reminded the audience that the Japanese national assembly had taken up the issue in 1990, but denied any wrongdoing, claiming that private companies had committed the crimes; furthermore, despite an investigation after receiving a list of public questions from the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, Japan claimed that there was no evidence and avoided blame. She urged women to join efforts to resolve the issue, arguing that over the past 46 years since the end of World War Two, the Japanese government had never expressed remorse and had been destroying evidence regarding the sexual slavery issue, a crime unprecedented in the history of human warfare.

The conference hall was full of enthusiasm, and following statements by participants that similar conferences should

be held in the future along with promises to strengthen solidarity between women, Yi U-chǒng proposed to hold the next meeting in Seoul, at which Yō Yōn-ku proposed that the next one after that should be held in Pyongyang. The conference is remembered as an opportunity to strengthen solidarity among women from the three countries with a view to achieving unification of the two Koreas and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The Second Discussion Forum in Seoul

At the first conference, the North Korean delegation proposed that the next meeting be termed a “discussion forum” rather than using the English word “symposium,” and the participants agreed to this proposal for the next forum. The three South Korean delegates returned to South Korea with the heavy burden of preparing for the Seoul Discussion Forum. The forum was to be held in November, and only five months were left for preparation.

An executive committee was formed, and the working-level team was made up of the three South Korean delegates. The head of the executive committee was Yi Mi-kyōng, standing vice-chairwoman of the Korea Federation of Women’s Associations. The head of the discussion committee was Kim Yun-ok, director of the Christian Women’s Peace Research Institute. The head of promotion was Han Myōng-suk, chairwoman of Womenlink. The head of the protocol committee was An Sang-nim, director of the Asia Christian Women’s Education Academy. The head of the financial administration committee was Yun Yōng-ae, financial director of the Church Women’s Union. The head of the cultural committee was Kang Sōng-hye, vice-director of the women’s committee at the National Council of Churches (NCC). After they finished work each day, they met to prepare for the Seoul Discussion Forum.

Communication with the North Korean executive committee involved faxing information to Shimizu’s office, which then forwarded it to North Korea, and responses from North Korea went through the same route. Shimizu, who had earned the confidence of North Korea’s leaders and had

even written a book about the lives of North Korean women during her 20 years of visiting the country, was a Japanese of good conscience who was working to ensure Japan would take responsibility for its crimes during the colonial rule of Korea—just like Germans apologized regarding their own unfortunate history—and provide compensation to the survivors of the sexual slavery system.

The South Korean Executive Committee received permission from the South Korean government's Ministry of Unification (MOU) for the North Korean delegation to cross the land border between the two Koreas. The committee also requested funds from the government, but was refused; however, Yun Yōng-ae, head of the financial administration committee, created a "reception committee" to lobby for funds from the female heads of churches. Despite the fact that the Roh Tae-woo administration was in power at the time, we were fortunate that the MOU and Korean Central Intelligence Agency promised to provide as much support as possible.

Finally, the Second Seoul Discussion Forum was held at the Ramada by Wyndham Olympia hotel, located in the center of Seoul, on November 25, 1991. Germany had dramatically achieved unification in October of 1990, bringing a positive light to our future path. The North Korean delegation led by Yō Yōn-ku crossed over the land border and arrived in South Korea. Yi Hyo-jae went out to meet them, and they stopped at the gravesite of Yō's father, Yō Un-hyung, in Suyu-ri. Sensing he could be assassinated, Yō Un-hyung had entrusted his two daughters to President Kim Il-sung before his eventual assassination in South Korea. A total of 46 years had passed before one of his daughters was able to visit his grave. Yō laid a wreath on her father's grave and wailed as journalists gathered around to take pictures and posed a flood of questions to her.

The North Korean delegation consisted of nine members: Yō Yōn-ku, vice-chairwoman of the Supreme People's Assembly; Kim Sōnok, deputy director of the Reception Department for Overseas Koreans; Chōng Myōng-sun, secretary-general of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland; Hong Sōn-ok, director of the Disarmament and Peace Research Institute; and

Ch'oe Ok-hŭi, a preacher with the Christian Federation. Six others accompanied the delegation, including Yi Yŏn-hwa of the North Korean Foreign Culture Liaison Committee; Chŏng Yŏng-hŭi, professor of political science at Kim Il-sung University; Secretary Sŏ Kŭm-sŏn, and Song Sŏn-yŏng, culture director at the Chosun Student Council, along with six journalists, including Kang Yŏng-su, a reporter for the Korea Central News Agency.

Meanwhile, the Japanese delegation arrived one after another at the airport. I am a Japanese speaker, so I was at the airport to receive the Japanese delegation. The Japanese delegation consisted of three representatives: Miki Mutsuko, the wife of the prime minister and former president of the UN Women's Association; Shimizu Sumiko, a member of the National Diet's Upper House and chairman of the Japan Women's Association's Central Headquarters; and Watanabe Mina, chairwoman of Japan's YWCA. The observers included Juwa Keiko, vice chairwoman of the Japan Women's Association's Central Headquarters along with the organization's secretary general Rumiko Ogawa; Yokohama city council member Hirose Reiko; Mihoko Takahashi, a member of the editorial team of the Japan Women's Association's "Women's Newspaper"; and Chiemi Ishii, who was studying at Ewha Womans University.

The South Korean delegation consisted of Yi U-chŏng, Yi Hyo-jae, and Yun Chŏngok. There were 10 members in the reception committee, including Kong Tŏk-kwi, former first lady; Kim Ok-ra, chairwoman of the World Methodist Women's Church; Kim Chae-ŭn, head of the NCC's Women's Committee; Kim Hyŏn-cha, former Democratic Justice Party lawmaker; Pak Sun-kŭm, chairwoman of the Church Women's Federation; Pak Yŏng-suk, Democratic Party lawmaker; Yi T'ae-yŏng, director of the Korea Family Law Counseling Center; Chŏng Ŭi-suk, president of the Ewha Woman's University Foundation; Cho A-ra, former chairwoman of YWCA Korea; and Cho Hwa-sun, chairman of the National Unification Committee of the Federation of Women's Organizations, along with six members of the Executive Committee.

The forum began at 5 PM amid an atmosphere of excitement with around 300 participants. Yun Chŏng-ok

made the forum's opening statement, saying, "Humans have lived amid more times of war than times of peace. However, we women conceive life and love peace and have held this discussion forum in Seoul, the first of its kind since division, as a way for North and South Korea to think about how women can fulfill our roles and responsibilities to the fullest to achieve peace in Asia."

Yi Hyo-jae explained progress that had been made leading up to the Seoul Discussion Forum, followed by a welcome speech from Yi U-chŏng. Yi praised the efforts of Japan's "conscientious forces" and said that those who came to the forum from North Korea were our relatives. Yi stated that we had been brought together by our firm willingness to never repeat the national tragedy (of division). She concluded her welcome speech with the hope that the forum would be an opportunity to achieve genuine peace in Asia through peace on a unified Korean Peninsula.

I was in charge of leading the discussion, which was divided into three sessions following agreement between the North Korean and Japanese delegations: "Patriarchal Culture and Women," "Peace and Women," and "Unification and Women." The forum commenced as each delegation gave their presentations and heard responses from the panelists. The presentation of "Patriarchal Culture and Women" was presented by Cho Hyun-gyo, professor at Ewha Womans University, and the panelists were Kim Sŏn-ok, member of the Central Committee and the Democratic Women's Union of Korea, and Watanabe Mina of YWCA Japan.

1) "Patriarchal Culture and Women"

Cho explained the legal status of women in South Korean society and their status within families, saying that while patriarchy had disappeared as a formal system, it was still a part of culture. This, she said, meant that the lives of women and men are defined differently in each area of society. Cho also pointed out that the hostile relationship between the two Koreas due to division was inflicting an excessive military and financial burden on Korean society along with the country's "military culture." She argued that North and South Korea

should work together to solve these problems together.

North Korea's Kim Sŏn-ok, who served as a discussant, said that she was thrilled that North and South Korean women were holding a discussion forum for the first time since division and in front of an audience of 70 million of their compatriots. She pointed out that Cho's analysis of patriarchy was based on culture and not "class." Kim then proceeded to list the statuses afforded to women in North Korean society, saying that under the country's excellent people-centered social system, all women have become "completely liberated" as they have become masters of the country and society just like men.

Japanese discussant Watanabe Mina apologized with tears in her eyes about Japan's past aggression and colonial domination while sharing her experience of being educated within militaristic society. She talked about her own experience of living with a sense of inferiority after receiving an education that placed importance on "power." Watanabe expressed hope that Korean unification would be achieved with the "possibilities of strength" inherent in women, the strength they can share, the power of words, and the power of creating large amounts of money through the collection of smaller amounts. During the open discussion session, there were a flood of questions about the "complete liberation" of North Korean women, and enthusiastic discussion was held, focusing on Japan's imperialist system and patriarchy.

2) "Unification and Women"

The second theme of the event, "Unification and Women," was presented by Chŏng Myŏng-sun of North Korea. She stated that unification of the motherland is a "supreme task" yearned for greatly by the entire Korean people, and would mean the unity of the entire people into one nation, just as the Korean people had been originally. Unification, she went on, would bring about the establishment of autonomy and complete independence. Chŏng remarked that men and women have different reactions to unification; for example, women shed tears when they think about it. This, she said, is because unification is closely connected to the fate of women,

and because division has caused Korean women to live apart from their parents and children, while war has caused them to lose their husbands and sons. As such, women are intensely interested in achieving unification as they are an essential part of efforts to bring it about.

The North Korean delegation noted that North Korea promulgated the Equal Rights Act in July 1946 and proposed that 1995 be the “first year of unification,” saying that women were emerging as a powerful and dignified agent of historical development, taking responsibility for their own destiny while receiving enormous benefits from the state. The delegation also remarked that the North had consistently proposed to adopt a declaration of non-aggression between the North and South as well as between the North and the United States, along with proposals to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

The North Korean delegation argued that to resolve the problem of unification, the nation must be placed first and that the system changes according to the development of society. The delegation said that the North and the South have distinct national homogeneity, so they should put the nation first and move forward with discussions. At the same time, the delegation remarked that while the North’s “Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo” proposal was logical and ideal, it has no intention to force it upon the South. The delegation appealed to North and South Korean women to work together to convene a “National Unification Political Consultative Conference,” where women from the North and South seek to identify and decide on ways to reunify the country together.

Professor Yi Kyōng-suk of Sookmyung Women’s University, a discussant, stated that South Korea is a pluralistic society, so a diverse range of opinions on unification exist in contrast to North Korea, where the government and the private spheres share the same plans for unification. To promote awareness of a national community, she argued that the two Koreas should find commonalities in various areas such as society, economy, and culture through active opening, exchanges, and cooperation. Yi noted that, first of all, it is necessary to acknowledge the distinct existence of two different systems on the Korean Peninsula and to gradually develop a basis for unity while expanding the areas in which

the two Koreas interact while adhering to the three principles of national unification: achieving unification independently, unitedly, and peacefully. That would lead to the creation of a national welfare state and ultimately one nation, one country, and one system. As such, she said, the two Koreas must orient themselves towards the restoration of homogeneity.

During the discussion, Chŏng Myŏng-sun consistently insisted on the superiority of the North's federal system of unification, and the South's Kyung-sook Yi, who began the discussion, insisted on the superiority of the South Korean government's plan for the unification of the Korean community. The two sides focused only on stating their positions, which unfortunately only confirmed their mutual disagreement rather than narrowing the gap between their two perspectives. The participants thus agreed that in the future when the two sides meet to discuss the unification issue, they should focus on establishing a unification plan on the non-governmental rather than governmental level.

3) "Peace and Women"

Rep. Shimizu Sumiko, who presented on this topic, explained Japan's historical responsibility for aggression and colonial rule and the issue of post-war compensation before expressing her remorse. Moreover, she said that according to the Japanese constitution, there are three principles that Japan must adhere to: "do not make, do not possess, and do not transport weapons." She explained that there was no process of confirming the deployment of American nuclear weapons or military exercises, and mentioned large-scale US-ROK joint military exercises and that they are incompatible with the establishment of peace in Asia.

North Korea's Hong Sŏn-ok, who was the discussant, said that North Korea had always made the best effort to ensure peace, and that the country had proposed a non-aggression declaration and reduction in military forces several times over the years. She also mentioned that North Korea had made efforts to ensure peace with the US military and the removal of nuclear weapons. However, as the military confrontation was intensifying on the Korean Peninsula

day by day, and given that war could be triggered by trivial unforeseen incidents, Hong argued that the basic cause of this crisis was the “strength” held by the US and South Korea, and that this “strength” should be eliminated. Hong argued that North Korea had never invaded South Korea and that no one wanted to invade the South, and she called women to join forces to bring about the withdrawal of US troops, to stage a disarmament movement, and to work to suspend military exercises so peace can be guaranteed.

During the discussion, there was a stir in the hall about Hong’s remarks regarding the “invasion of the North.” On the other hand, her remarks about the large-scale US-ROK Team Spirit military exercises in South Korea creating a serious quasi-state of war and psychological anxiety in North Korea brought about applause and sympathy from the participants.

At the end of the forum, the participants expressed hope that these forums would continue to fill the gap in perspectives that exist between the North and South. However, demonstrations and propaganda by anti-communist conservatives continued on the overpass in front of the hotel everyday during the forum, making the participants uncomfortable.

The Third Discussion Forum in Pyongyang

The Pyongyang Discussion Forum was held in Pyongyang from September 1 to 6, 1992. The South Korean women’s delegation crossed the 38th Parallel by land and arrived in Pyongyang within two hours of passing Kaesong along a highway that had been paved for the celebration of President Kim Il-sung’s 80th birthday. The delegation’s members were told they were the first guests to use the highway following its construction. As the delegation entered downtown Pyongyang, people filled the windows of houses on both sides of the road while waving welcome flags, and the words “South Korean Women’s Delegation for Reunification” were written on the side of the bus we rode on. I could get a sense of what the North Korean delegation, which had anticipated a large crowd welcoming them in Seoul, had thought when they saw the demonstrations of the anti-communist conservatives

shouting on the overpass. I was filled with mixed emotions as I saw the large numbers of people welcoming us as one – a characteristic of a totalitarian society.

The South Korean delegation was made up of three representatives, Yi U-chōng, Yi Hyo-jae, and Yun Chōng-ok, and six executive committee members. The government had required us to include 12 women who would act as observers. Many of those who had supported the Seoul Discussion Forum wanted to go to Pyongyang, but it was not possible due to the limited number of people and government observers. As a result, we suffered a great deal of criticism and condemnation.

After we arrived at Pyongyang's Koryo Hotel, we visited the Pyongyang Maternity Center and Daycare Center in the afternoon, and in the evening there was a welcome dinner. The discussion forum was held for only one day on September 2. The theme was "Great National Unity and the Role of Women," and the sub-themes were "Japanese Invasion and Domination of Korea," "The Post-War Compensation Issue," and "The Creation of Peace and the Role of Women." These topics were agreed upon by the executive committees of the North, South, and Japan. Under the concept of "great national unity," the North was already proposing for coexistence and co-prosperity with the North and South joining forces to transition to a system of peace.

Referring to the adoption of the agreement between the North and South Korean governments, presenter Kang Ch'un-kūm from North Korea emphasized that the two sides should transcend differences in thought and ideology to achieve reconciliation and unity with a view to restoring the original single nation of Korea. She further mentioned that women from North and South Korea should meet often, adding this impressive statement: "When our women meet, half of the nation will meet." These words provoked applause from the women in the hall as it meshed with the sentiment expressed during the Seoul Discussion Forum in support of women's culture, which loves life and peace, as opposed to men's culture, which focuses on war and power.

However, we were nervous when she proposed to create an organization such as the National Unification Women's Organizations Council as a consultative body for inter-Korean

and overseas Korean women's organizations. When she was asked whether a unified Korea should be capitalist or socialist, Yi Hyo-jae spoke non-aggressively and in a confident and wise manner, leaving space for us to face such aspirations and put them off until a later date so we could work together in the interim.

On the issue of Japanese colonization and reparations, there were sharp comments from the North and South Korean speakers toward the Japanese government's attitude regarding the sexual slavery issue. The Japanese presenter argued that the Japanese government was responsible, and the women of the three countries who shared the same opinion on the issue decided that in the future they should focus on resolving the issue because it was something they could work on together. Although the discussion forum was later suspended following an unanimous decision by the Pyongyang Discussion Forum, Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, and the North Korean Executive Committee continued to work together on the sexual slavery issue, and joined forces to hold the "Year 2000 Sexual Slavery Wartime Criminal International Women's Court" in Tokyo.

I think it was meaningful that from 1997 to 2004, while I served as joint director of Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan and Hong Sŏn-ok served as the North's representative, we continued to work to reach an agreement in the discussion forum to resolve the sexual slavery issue.

The Pyongyang Discussion Forum was held in a single day, and the next morning we left for Mt. Kŭmgang and toured the Haegŭm River. Back in Pyongyang, on the morning of the last day of our visit, we were shocked to learn that we were going to the Kim Il-sung's Presidential Palace, and we all changed into hanbok. When I entered the palace, which resembles the Elysee Palace in Paris, they told us we would start with a commemorative photo, so we took an historic photo with President Kim Il-sung in the center. President Kim Il-sung was hard-of-hearing, so Yŏ Yŏn-ku had to explain everything again in a loud voice for him to understand; however, given our status as honored guests, he recommended food and gave explanations about the side dishes. President Kim suddenly

died after going to inspect his villa in Mt. Myohyang in April 1994 amid preparations for Kim Young-sam's visit to North Korea. I think he liked Mt. Myohyang more than Mt. Kūmgang.

Our group arrived at the 38th Parallel as the setting sun lit up the sky in beautiful colors. All we had to do to cross the border at Panmunjom was to step over a cement block that was about 10 cm high. When I turned around, the North Korean delegation, the Japanese delegation, and overseas Koreans who had followed us down were waving goodbye. They were shouting out, "Let's meet again, see you again . . ." as they waved their hands and wiped away tears.

The Fourth Discussion Forum in Tokyo

It was our decision to continue the discussion forum's rotation from Seoul to Pyongyang and then to Tokyo until unification could be achieved, so each country organized an executive committee to realize it. The Tokyo Discussion Forum was prepared by the Japanese Executive Committee with a date set for April 24, 1993. North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT had soured the state of affairs. However, the North Korean delegation proudly entered Japan despite the hostile atmosphere of the Japanese government, and we successfully conducted the discussions in Tokyo and Osaka.

As agreed in the Pyongyang Discussion Forum, the first topic of the forum dealt with Japan's war responsibility and compensation issues with a focus on the issue of Japanese military sexual slavery. The second topic was, "What can women do for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula?" Yi Hyo-jae, the South Korean delegation's representative, and Sin Hye-su, the director of Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan's international committee, explained how the issue had been raised at the UN Human Rights Commission in regards to the irresponsible attitude of the Japanese government. Yi also criticized the positions of the Japanese and Korean governments, declaring that there was no statute of limitations for dealing with crimes against humanity.

As agreed at the Pyongyang Discussion Forum, the debate focused on the sexual slavery issue and most of the criticism

was targeted at the Japanese government. North Korea's representative Ch'oe Kŭm-ch'un criticized Japan for claiming that the Ŭlsa Treaty was null and void, and condemned Japan's efforts to solve the problem with humanitarian funds, saying that six million people had been forcibly deported based on the Japanese data alone.

Japanese feminist historian Suzuki Yuko pointed out that the inaccurate Japanese view of Korea is due to a distorted sense of human rights. She accused the government of taking away women's dignity, insisting that Japan's modern politics continue to do so. In short, Suzuki said that Japan's patriarchal culture is related to its overseas expansionism and militarism that is inherent to the ideology of the Japanese emperor system, and that the sexual oppression of women under this patriarchal system amounted to state-regulated prostitution. She emphasized that the sexual slavery system was actually a forced prostitution system and allowed for rape. Suzuki further said that Japanese feminists had failed to fully understand this kind of prostitution and rape culture and that this culture had made such violent policies as the sexual slavery system rampant. She noted that while Japanese feminists were able to consider sexual discrimination and class discrimination, they had not considered "national discrimination" as completing this "trinity." She further noted that the sexual slavery issue was an issue facing Japan's feminists.

In regards to the second topic, the discussion focused on denuclearization of North Korea and its withdrawal from the NPT. Much of the discussion centered on how to make the Korean Peninsula a denuclearized zone or establish a nuclear weapon free zone in Northeast Asia. The discussion was led by the North's Hong Sŏn-ok, head of the Institute for Disarmament and Peace, the Japan Socialist Party's Doi Takako, and me. We agreed that the NPT was itself unfair because it allowed inspections of and restrictions on non-nuclear countries by those with nuclear weapons. We emphasized that the best way forward to achieve peace was to denuclearize, but because of transactions happening on a state-to-state level, this would not be easy; thus, women must take up the mantle to increase support for denuclearization.

Creating “Women Making Peace”

The Seoul Discussion Forum was held next. However, when the Kim Young-sam government took office, conflicts arose between the North and South Korean governments. When President Kim Il-sung died in April 1994, the discussion forum's days came to an end. Women in the North and South could no longer organize events under the “discussion forum” banner. The driving force behind inter-Korean women's exchanges passed to Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, and as I became co-director of the council in 1997, the organization again became part of North-South women's exchanges focused on the sexual slavery issue. Hong Sŏn-ok, the North Korean representative who had been a partner in the discussion forums, became the chairwoman of the Committee on Measures for Compensation to the former “Comfort Women for the Japanese Army” and the Pacific War Victims again joining forces with Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. That allowed us to meet frequently and exchange opinions. All this was follow-up to our decision to work together on the sexual slavery issue at the Pyongyang Discussion Forum.

As the prospects for the future of the discussion forum darkened, the South Korean Executive Committee came to an agreement one day not to sit and wait for an opportunity, but to create a women's peace movement group in South Korea and focus its efforts on the issue of demilitarization and to expand the peace movement. In order to carry out this work efficiently, we agreed to join the Federation of Women's Associations and to work together with them nationwide. Based on this agreement, the South's Executive Committee was renamed the “Women Making Peace.”

Founded on March 28, 1997, the Women Making Peace was the first organization active in the Korean women's peace movement. The Korea Women's Institute for Peace Studies is affiliated with the Women Making Peace and shares the same

office. The organization has now matured over the 24 years since its founding. Even after the inter-Korean discussion forums were suspended, Women Making Peace continued its attempts to engage in inter-Korean women's exchanges—thanks to the North Korea policies of the Kim Dae-jung and No Mu-hyŏn administrations—as part of efforts to broaden the scope of mutual understanding between North and South Korean women.

In the limited space of this essay, I have introduced the story of about 2,000 women who over four discussion forums talked about peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the issue of the Japanese military sexual slavery. Some of the many participants in these forums have passed away. After the outbreak of COVID-19, it is difficult for anyone to predict how inter-Korean women's exchanges will take place. However, I would like to conclude my story with the hope that inter-Korean women's exchanges aimed at overcoming division will continue to be made by women, whether or not they meet in person in the future.

