



# Time to stop looking at geographical coordinates and create new paradigm

## We must embrace our overseas compatriots as Koreans, regardless of place of residence or nationality

I came to the United States to study in 1962 and have lived here for 62 years. After retiring, I have been traveling back and forth between Korea and the U.S. once or twice a year and often ask myself, "Which country am I from?"

But regardless of the geopolitical unrest and political chaos we see on the outside, Korea's economic and cultural stature continues to amaze the world, and Korean companies are dominating markets in every country in the world.

Gone are the days of the early immigrants who traveled to unfamiliar lands with only a map, the 1960s when people went to study abroad with \$150 in their pockets, and the "Leave Korea" era when millions crossed the Pacific Ocean to North and South America, and the days of gazing at the full moon and crying for home are behind us. No matter where we are, we should remember the 36 years of Japanese occupation, the Korean War and the poverty of the past and be grateful for the life we have now. But if we are to look forward to the dynamic Korea of today and tomorrow, we must not just dwell on the past.

The geographical distance between Korea and overseas Koreans around the world is the same as it was in the past. However, the economic, political, cultural and language barriers that transcend physical space are rapidly breaking down. Today, the world has become a global village, and we can travel to and from many countries without visas and conduct business over the internet. However, we still haven't gotten away from the concept of national versus foreigner (including overseas compatriots).

It's time for overseas Koreans to forget the geographical coordinates of wherever they are and create a new paradigm of "What can I and should I do?"

Although it is long overdue, it is historic that the Korean government has created the Overseas Koreans Agency. I hope its philosophy will be "To embrace Koreans wherever they live and whatever their nationality." It's a big leap forward. It will be like when Switzerland embraced the Jews as their own people from birth.

Moreover, Korea has recently become the country with the lowest



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birth rate, which has become a serious social problem, and it is difficult for Korean companies with a global presence to maintain a production base in the country.

In this situation, the role of overseas Koreans must be seriously reconsidered. Meaning that we must immediately build a foundation for them to contribute to Korea right where they are. Granting permanent residency or citizenship immediately after birth, simplifying immigration procedures, academic international exchanges, exchanging dual degrees with foreign universities free from the current strict regulations of the Ministry of Education, utilizing the next generation of scientists and engineers locally,

taking bold measures to attract projects, and establishing local research institutes and companies to bring in talent are national tasks that should be established beyond the level of the OKA. If we continue to be tied up in the issue of preferential treatment in military service and national sentiment, we will not be able to go out into the world.

I have been living in the U.S. for a long time and have been working to teach Korean to the second and third generations, passing on history and culture to instill the Korean identity, making them global citizens and contributing to Korea. Recently, the Sejong Science and Technology Innovation Center was created in the U.S. through the initiative of the Korean American Scientists and Engineers Association, and we are trying to implement the "Hongik Human" (meaning broad benefits for the world) ideology, which is a way for Korean and American companies to collaborate with Korean scientists and engineers, and for the next generation of Koreans and Americans to serve as an outpost to help less fortunate countries.

I hope that all of our compatriots around the world will take a step forward from "Think globally, act locally!" to "Think and act globally!" Helping all the underprivileged countries in the world, not just our own, is what it means to be the No. 1 nation in the world. I sincerely ask the Korean government and the OKA to strategically and boldly implement a large budget for this task. 🇰🇷

