

Researcher's Eyes

Achieving world peace through art and culture: A declaration at the Busan International Cultural Forum

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Last month, on 4 and 5 May, I attended the Busan Cultural Conference in South Korea. I was invited by the Busan Cultural Foundation to participate in a comprehensive discussion hosted by the Busan International Cultural Forum on the first day.

The theme of the forum was 'How can arts and culture change the world by restoring peace between conflicting neighbouring countries?' Attempting to answer such a question is extremely ambitious, but the Busan Cultural Foundation has set the idea of restoring world peace through arts and culture as its main international cultural policy agenda, while the Foundation's 2030 Vision seeks to address the goals of realising cultural policies that reflect 'peace' and 'partnership', two of the 17 SDGs.

The forum included three keynotes: 'UNESCO's Cultural Policy for Inclusion, Understanding, and Cooperation' by Paola Leoncini Bartoli (Director of Cultural Policy and Development, UNESCO Headquarters); 'Overcoming Regional Conflicts through Cultural Diversity and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific' by Feng Jing (Chief of Cultural Unit, UNESCO Asia Pacific); and 'Highlighting the Impact of Cultural and Social Practices on Peace Building Initiated by Busan' by Nam Song-woo (Emeritus Professor, Koshin University). These were then followed by a comprehensive discussion.

The speakers at the discussion were Nam Seng-woo, Lee Chang-gi (Chairman, Korea Association of Regional Cultural Foundations, CEO of Seoul Cultural Foundation) and the author, while the moderator was Lee Mee-yeon (CEO of Busan Cultural Foundation). I made remarks based on a discussion paper prepared in advance at the request of the organisers. With the endorsement of the Busan Cultural Foundation and the participants in attendance, I would like to share it below.

Three key aspects of arts and culture that are essential for peace (Author's statement)

I was born in 1958, and I have never felt closer to war than I do now. I have a renewed awareness

of how precious peace is. I am sure that the same is true for all of you. In these times, international exchange and mutual understanding through arts and culture have become more important than ever before.

Why arts and culture? To answer this question, I would like to make three points.

The first is that arts and culture are capable of facilitating international exchange independent of politics and economics. That is to say, even if countries are politically conflicted with each other, or if there is economic friction between them, international exchange and mutual understanding through culture is still possible. This is because artists are free to transcend national borders and pursue artistic endeavours without being constrained by political or economic conditions.

National power and economic strength are the seeds of competition or strife, but there is no competition in arts and culture. Yes, there are piano competitions and film festival competitions, but these are not conceived solely to establish who is the best, but rather as a mechanism to create better cultural productions and identify talented artists, whose achievements will be returned to the world at large.

The second is that arts and culture are essential to the increasingly important city-to-city exchanges, because arts and culture symbolise the value and attractiveness of a city.

The 'Cultural City of East Asia', which was established in 2014 by the culture ministers of Korea, Japan, and China, is a realisation of this very idea.

In its first year, Kwangju Metropolitan City in South Korea, Quanzhou City in China, and Yokohama City in Japan were selected as cultural cities, and I served as the chairman of the programming committee of Yokohama City.

Exchanges with Gwangju began smoothly, and Yokohama's art NPO BankART organised a large-scale exhibition called 'Dream of East Asia'. As part of this project, a contemporary sequel to the 'Joseon Korean Diplomatic Expenditures' was also developed. The Busan Cultural Foundation greatly assisted in the realisation of this project, I heard.

It must be said, though, that at first I was very concerned about the exchange with Quanzhou City. This was because Japan-China relations were at their worst at the time due to the Senkaku Islands issue. When the relationship worsened and books by Japanese authors were withdrawn from bookstores in China, Haruki Murakami, a Japanese novelist, described the exchange of cultures and artists as 'a pathway for souls to come and go', and warned that such a pathway must not be blocked¹.

However, when Yokohama City visited Quanzhou City, it received a warm welcome, and the two cities began to strongly promote cultural exchanges regardless of the political issues between the two countries.

As I mentioned in my first point, the cultural exchange between the cities transcended the political conflicts between the countries. Busan was also selected as an East Asian Cultural City in 2018.

Third, culture fosters deep friendship and trust between people, especially between individuals. ‘Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.’ As you know, this is the first sentence of the UNESCO Charter. It seems to me that individuals, transcending national borders, understanding each other through culture, and respecting each other's differences are the cornerstones of peace.

Let me introduce one representative example of Japan's international cultural programmes advocating peace. It is the Pacific Music Festival Sapporo, or PMF, which began in 1990 as a music education festival. It was founded by renowned American conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein. Around 100 promising young musicians selected by audition from all over the world gather in Sapporo every year for a month during the summer to share a meal and receive instruction from world-class performers such as the Vienna Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic.

Bernstein wanted to establish an educational music festival in Asia similar to the Tanglewood Festival, which had achieved great success in Massachusetts, USA, since its foundation in the 1930s. He initially planned to hold the festival in Beijing. However, the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 forced the festival to abandon its Beijing plans. Then Sapporo was suddenly selected as a candidate, and the city made the wise decision to accept the invitation.

In the 30 years since then, more than 3,600 PMF graduates from 77 countries and regions have participated in the programme. The number of participants from Korea is the second highest after Japan, with 234, and there are also participants from Ukraine and Russia. They continue to communicate after graduation, encouraging each other to play an active role in orchestras around the world.

I am a member of the PMF board of trustees, and, during a trustee meeting just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine last February, one of the trustees suggested that Russia should be excluded from the auditions. I, however, argued that the doors should not be closed to anyone because the festival is about peace. Accordingly, auditions were, as before, open to all countries.

In a similar vein, conductor Christoph Eschenbach, who took over as music director after Bernstein's death and will do so again in 2019, said, ‘Music speaks to the emotions of people all over the world, transcending politics, religion, skin colour, and everything else, bringing people together.’

Again, arts and culture are essential for international peace because (1) they are independent of politics and economics, (2) they are essential for city-to-city exchanges, and (3) they create deep trust between individuals.

There is an unfortunate history between Korea and Japan. As a Japanese citizen, I believe that we must not forget to reflection on this. However, we know that Japan has long nurtured its own culture from the Korean Peninsula, as evidenced by the introduction of Buddhism to Japan through Baekje in the 6th century.

For more than two hundred years, the Edo Shogunate carried out a ‘cultural mission’ of 500 people from the Korean Peninsula as the ‘Joseon missions to Japan’. It can even be said that without this sort of cultural exchange with Korea, the present Japanese culture would exist. I believe so.

This conference may be just a brief moment in the centuries-long history of Korea-Japan exchange. However, I sincerely hope that through this conference, Korea and Japan will deepen their friendship through culture, and that this in turn will lead to the building of international peace.

Thank you very much.

Busan Declaration for Peace and Cooperation through Arts and Culture

After the discussion, the forum concluded with the Busan Declaration of Peace and Partnership through Arts and Culture Embracing the UNESCO World Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the Spirit of Joseon Tongsinisa prepared by the Busan Cultural Foundation. It began with a preamble – ‘We, the participants of the Busan Culture Conference, came together in Busan, Republic of Korea on 4 May, 2023, to proudly declare our unwavering commitment to promoting world peace through arts and culture. We firmly believe that cultural policies should prioritise the goal of promoting peace, understanding, and sustainable development on the international agenda’ – before moving onto the following seven articles:

1. Cultural Diversity and Rights
2. Arts and Culture for Peace
3. Culture Policies for Sustainable Development
4. Cultural Diversity and Inclusiveness
5. Social Impact of Cultural Policies
6. Cultural Partnerships
7. Solidarity and Cooperation in Cultural Projects

Finally, under the headings ‘Farewell to Arms, and Welcome to Arts and Culture’, the declaration concluded with the following statement: “Let us unite and use the transformative power of arts and culture to save the world. We, the participants of the Busan Culture Conference, wholeheartedly advocate world peace and sustainability through cultural policies. We pledge our unwavering support to implement this declaration and invite governments, cultural institutions, civil society organisations, artists, and academics to join us in this global mission. Together, we can build a more just, equitable, and sustainable world by harnessing the power of culture to promote peace and partnership. ... Now is the time for action. Let us come together and use the transformative power of arts and culture to build a better world for all.’

After the declaration was presented, guests of honour, officials from the conference organisers,

and speakers at the conference each took to the stage with banners reading 'Peace', 'Culture', 'Art', and 'Cooperation'. This conclusion strongly reflected the passion and enthusiasm of the Busan Cultural Foundation for this conference.



Guests of honour, representatives of the host organisation, and others presenting the Busan Declaration (photo by the author)

Joseon Tongsinisa , a symbol of peaceful cultural exchange

Another backdrop to this international conference is the Joseon Tongsinisa – a cultural mission of several hundred people sent from Korea to Japan at the invitation of the Edo Shogunate. It was dispatched 12 times between 1607 and 1811, via Tsushima, Shimonoseki, various cities in the Seto Inland Sea, Osaka, Kyoto, and Shizuoka, to Tokyo (Edo), sometimes even visiting Nikko.

Various documents and records that tell the story of those days are still preserved in various places in Japan and Korea visited by the Joseon Tongsinisa. In 2017 they were inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Heritage List. This was promoted by the Busan Cultural Foundation and the Japanese NPO Liaison Council of Joseon Tongsinisa (allied by Tsushima City, Setouchi City, Kyoto City, and other municipalities with a connection to the Joseon Tongsinisa).

It is said that the spirit of 'Faith with Sincerity and Integrity' (i.e. not deceiving or fighting each other but instead communicating honestly) advocated by Amemori Hoshu (1668–1775), a

Confucian scholar from the Tsushima Clan, underlies the Joseon Tongsinisa. The Joseon Tongsinisa is indeed a symbol of peaceful diplomacy and cultural exchange – principles to which the Busan Cultural Conference has held true.

On 5 May, the second day of the conference, a Japan-Korea UNESCO Round-Table Meeting was held. Opinions were exchanged on the possibility of youth and teacher exchange between Korea and Japan in the spirit of the Joseon Tongsinisa.

As is well known, Japan-Korea relations, which were said to be at their worst in the post-war period, took a turn for the better with the policy change by South Korean President Yun. The visit of President Yun and his wife to Japan on 16 March and Prime Minister Kishida's visit to South Korea on 7 May marked the resumption of shuttle diplomacy that had long been interrupted. On 16 March, the day of President Yun's visit, the Japan Federation of Economic Organisations (Nippon Keidanren) and the Korean National Business Federation jointly announced the 'Japan-Korea Future Partnership' declaration, agreeing to establish the Japan-Korea and Korea-Japan Future Partnership Fund, respectively.

The Busan Cultural Conference, which coincidentally took place between the mutual visits of the presidents and prime ministers of the two countries, required vast amounts of time to plan and prepare, including coordination with UNESCO headquarters in Paris. It is based on the Foundation's strong belief that it is precisely at a time when Japan and South Korea are in the midst of a political confrontation that cultural exchange is necessary, utilising the spirit and experience of the Joseon Tongsinisa. Although there was no direct reference to this at the conference, the theme of international peace through culture was undoubtedly set with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and developments in China and North Korea in mind.

At a time of deepening political conflict, I deeply sympathise with and respect the philosophy and attitude of the Busan Cultural Foundation, which aims to build international peace through culture. I am sure that I am not the only one who feels this way.

¹ Haruki Murakami, *a pathway for souls to come and go*, Asahi Shinbun, 28 September, 2012