

## Let's Be Old Friends As We Were

The tall, slender, beautiful statue of the Kudara kannon in the Taihoden of Horyuji Temple is said to have been introduced as the name denotes, from the ancient country of Kudara on the Korea Peninsula. In the ancient days, Chinese cultures including Buddhism were introduced into Japan through Korea to greatly affect the formation of the cultures of ancient Japan. Korea was, so to speak, an elder brother country to Japan in this sense.

Geometrically, however, the Korea Peninsula lies as if a dagger pointed close to the side of the Japanese Islands. Japan therefore treated the Peninsula as the strategic key point to check the down invasion of the power from the mainland China. Contrary to the inflow streams of the cultures, Japan regarded it necessary to use the Peninsula as a national defense breakwater.

Retrospecting only a century ago, disregarding things in hundreds of years ago, we see Japan took such national safety and security policies including the "Conquer Korea" arguments in 1873 and the Japan-Korea Amalgamation Treaty in 1907 which intended to safeguard Japan at the sacrifice of Korea.

Consequently, Japan and Korea, though located very close to each other with only a strip of water between them, have since then been desperately unhappy, remote neighbors to each other.

Quite recently, the hard feeling between the two nations has begun to melt. The exchange of the latest visit of the Korean President to Japan and the address of the Japan's Emperor to the President representing the Korean people has placed a significant mark of new friendship to be developed hereafter between the two neighboring nations. It is indeed greatly pleasant to imagine the growth of familiar friendship in all of us as old intimate neighbors.

Now, the Zenkoji Scholarship Society for Priestly Study Abroad has relations with 5 Koreans. With the support of the Scholarship Society, three Koreans are studying in Japan, one priest from Japan is studying in Korea, and another one who fulfilled the Scholarship study is now active in Seoul and has recently entered the Buddhist priesthood at home under the guide of Rev. Sato.

In the course of this small stream of our Japan-Korea Buddhist exchange, I had an opportunity of visiting Korea in mid April. It was a really significant trip to me, renewing my mind to be of further assistance to the development of Japan-Korea Buddhist relations. This issue, therefore, features articles on Korean Buddhism to be read by as many readers as possible.

Let us endeavor to change neighboring remote strangers to friendly close neighbors.