

# The Korea Herald

---



## Editorial

[E-MAIL](#)[PRINT](#)

### [Kaleidoscope] `Welcome to 22nd century!`

When I returned to Seoul 25 years ago from my six years of stay in the United States, Professor Kim Uchang at Korea University told me with a wry smile, "Welcome to the 19th century!"

His characterization was an appropriate depiction of South Korea at that time. It was the early 1980s, when Korea was under the ruthless military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan. There was no freedom of speech or press. On campus, I helplessly witnessed daily clashes between riot police and tear-gassed students. I found myself in a whirlwind of political turmoil and social unrest. Returning from the United States to Korea in the early 1980s was indeed like traveling back in time.

Today, however, South Korea has transformed into an entirely different nation. For example, one can enjoy freedom of speech and press and does not have to worry about political oppression or surveillance anymore. And military coups are no longer possible. At the same time, Korea has changed from a poverty-stricken, war-ridden agrarian country to a highly industrialized, affluent society in less than 60 years. Foreigners applaud South Korea as the only country that has simultaneously achieved democratization and spectacular economic development in such a short span of time.

Foreigners also agree that South Korea is a dynamic country where everything changes very quickly and people are diligent, vibrant and energetic. Indeed, it is a pleasant surprise to see tall new buildings sprout up here and there and the constant expansion of subway lines and stations. These developments show South Korea is rapidly advancing toward a better society.

Here, I find some things quite convenient and even better developed than in other advanced countries. The most outstanding is our excellent delivery service system. For example, many supermarkets deliver groceries to your home free of charge regardless of the amount you purchase.

Not only small village supermarkets, but also big ones in department stores offer fast, reliable delivery service for their customers. You can even order groceries on the phone from your home. This remarkable delivery service, of course, is not available in most countries.

Not only groceries, but virtually anything can be delivered to you in Korea. Every morning, for example, a laundryman comes to my apartment complex to pick up clothes for dry cleaning and delivers them back the next day. In other countries, you need to walk or drive to the cleaner's to drop off clothes and make another trip to pick them up later. Another incredibly convenient service you can take advantage of in Korea is the inexpensive, ubiquitous motorcycle-riding messengers who instantly

deliver anything anywhere.

Another convenience is the extensive use of credit cards. At McDonald`s or Burger King, young people buy hamburger meals for 4,000 won and pay by credit card. In most countries, people won`t use or accept a credit card for just \$3. But in Korea amazingly, even delivery boys accept credit cards. When the delivery boy from Papa John`s brings a pizza to my home, my daughter just hands over her credit card to have it swiped. Better yet, no tips are necessary. You can also use your credit card to pay for taxi fare in Korea.

The third most remarkable thing is the kindness and service from Korean telephone receptionists, repairmen and salesmen. Whenever I call the KT or LG service center, for example, I am always impressed by the politeness of their receptionists who immediately send technicians to my home. These technicians are also very kind. In other advanced countries, you must often go through an endless series of recorded messages before finally being connected to a not-so-friendly telephone receptionist. Korean salespersons, too, are mostly very cordial.

When I bought a Renault-Samsung car some time ago, I was quite impressed by not only the kindness of the salesman, but also the superb continuing service. You can see the same kindness and politeness at any Samsung store like Costco or E-Mart. Fly Asiana or Korean Air, and you will have a pleasant trip thanks to the friendly and attentive flight attendants.

Perhaps except in the sphere of politics, where politicians are still busy with ideological warfare, South Korea has already become an advanced country. Compared to three decades ago, Korea has remarkably changed and vastly improved. So these days I welcome my former students who return to Korea upon completion of their study in the United States by proudly proclaiming: "Welcome to the 22nd century!"

Kim Seong-kon is a professor of English at Seoul National University and a literary critic. - Ed.

2009.02.25

**Herald Premium** 매일매일 영머기사번역과 원어민 음성, MP3 다운로드 까지~ [클릭하세요!!](#)

© Copyright 2002~2004 Digital Korea Herald. All rights reserved