

Reflections from Participants of the Northeast Asia Youth Peace Dialogue

(In April 2013, seven participants and three organizers spent one week having workshops together and meetings with other Peace Boat passengers. They discussed the sources of inter-state tensions in contemporary Northeast Asian society. The following are reflections from two South Korean participants.)

Northeast Asia Youth Peace Dialogue was a powerful experience for me. Before my short stay on Peace Boat, peace was about ideology. “Internationalism is the right path we must take, so why not abandon nationalism and any affection for national governments altogether right away?” After meeting all those beautiful people onboard, I realize that peace is about people-to-people, heart-to-heart connection. Sometimes “international solidarity” sounds grandiose. A sense of connection or, more simply, “friendship” may be enough to explain the bond we built together through various exchanges in workshops, parties, outdoor exercises and other opportunities on Peace Boat. I was deeply touched by participants who were willing to open their minds to whatever a stranger like me says without judging. In particular, young Japanese people moved my heart with their sincerity and calm passion. I never experienced all those pleasantly emotional moments throughout my involvement in peace activism in my 20s. (I was born in the same year with Peace Boat ☺) That’s why I look forward to getting onboard again, hopefully for the entire voyage, and that’s why I talk about the magic of Peace Boat enthusiastically with my friends in Seoul.

Now China, especially Sichuan, is where MY friends live. My heart naturally goes out to those suffering from the earthquake. Many cities in Japan, including Kobe, Osaka, Tokyo, Yokohama, Sapporo and Kanagawa, are where MY friends would love, work for Peace Boat branches, learn English and further their interpreting skills after serving as CCs (volunteer interpreters), prepare for their next voyage and perhaps plan to visit Seoul. Now Hong Kong first reminds me of the two talented participants in the Northeast Asia Youth Peace Dialogue, (or “the GPPAC group,” as we were more often called onboard) before the beautiful night view at the Harbour City. I gained an enduring inspiration for the peace movement as well as how I relate to my “friends” in the global village.

I hope Peace Boat can continue to inspire a greater number of young people, particularly from South Korea, China, Hong Kong and potentially North Korea. They will also be a source of inspiration for Japanese participants who make up most of the boat. Improving the working conditions of CCs can help accelerate and enrich the exchanges, e.g. by setting up proper simultaneous interpreting booths for large-scale events. Lengthening the GPPAC group’s stay onboard in the future, perhaps to Singapore, will make the boat, the “floating school,” much more meaningful.

So, my message to the Peace Boat staff and those working with NARPI, GPPAC and

other networks for peace is basically, “Please keep up the good work.” Any peaceful resolution of conflict in Northeast Asia will require your efforts on the grassroots level. You make a difference. You sow the seeds of peace and hope. Let’s watch them grow together.

- Lee Sehyon

For me, the country or the place called Hong Kong has little space on the map in my head. I seldom know or have affection toward that country. But after the voyage, I got two friends from Hong Kong and got to visit Hong Kong once. I have an experience and a memory of Hong Kong with me now.

In the case of Japan, I used to be afraid of imagining going to Japan. And I was busy struggling with stuff in me and with my ordinary life in Seoul, before the voyage, so I had few chances to dream of peace between Korea and Japan. But now, I got love and affection toward traveling to Japan and talking to Japanese people. I dream of reconciliation between my country: Korea and Japan.

I’ve learned that people from different nationalities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds could be friends, no matter how long they were apart from each other. All of a sudden, by talking or playing, we could be friends. And I realized that thanks to the diversity of our backgrounds, we could share and play abundantly with our various cultures.

And I learned that it’s worth trying, worth trying to get over the thoughts and fears in me, to distinguish my thoughts and reality. After I decided to confront my fear, and to check if my fear is true, I could be friends with Japanese and I could see them as human beings like me.

One challenge was my English skill... The experience of talking to people in front of me and to the audiences in English and having discussions in English were challenging for me. I tried my best to understand different accents of English, and often I asked Meri or Kyoko for more explanation, because I want to understand clearly. I want to improve my skills in foreign languages – English, Japanese, and Chinese – as much as I can because I want to communicate with people on my own, freely.

And I want to keep in touch with people that I met onboard.

I want to hold my interest about Peace Boat and the peace movement, remembering and embracing the energy and hope that I got to have onboard.

I think this is the real challenge for me: holding a connection from my experience with my present life in Korea.

I'd love to keep practicing non-violent communication and mediation skills.

I'd love to recommend this kind of exchange opportunity to others. Sincerely, I want to be a participant first, if there's any chance to be with people on board together like I did again. But, if there are chances to participate this kind of exchange, I'll definitely recommend it to others. I already suggested my close friend to be onboard with me later. (She can speak Japanese and English fluently.) I experienced an exchange of warmth, welcoming, closeness and hope. And I hope many people could feel the same with me, so that more and more people in the world could dream of peace and integration of the world. Because, peace in the world is also my dream.

I was grateful to be onboard, meeting other people who work and pray for peace in this world. I've gotten hopeful after participating in the Northeast Asia Youth Peace Dialogue, also. I want to say thank you for making this kind of opportunity and picking me as one of the participants.

I'm going to take a coaching workshop of non-violent communication in May, and my mediation course finishes at the end of this year. I'd love to take Peace Boat again, after my course finished, for the whole round trip, as one who can share skills supporting Peace. (For me it's non-violent communication and mediation based on NVC)

I'd love to meet all of the people who helped me, working as staff of Peace Boat, NARPI, and GPPAC.

Thank you, take care, and love to see you again. See you next year.

- Heo Inhae