

SGI President Ikeda's Essay
He Had a Mission To Fulfill
By DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI President

I recently met again with President Chung Jong Taeck of South Korea's Chung Cheong College [July 4]. Previously Dr. Chung served as minister of the environment, and many people hoped that he would continue to be active in government, making use of his cabinet-level experience. But President Chung believes that education is the most sacred and noble of all professions, the one to which he wished to give the rest of his life. He decided to return to a private university in his hometown and devote his energies to educating the next generation, the youth who will shoulder the future.

Surely the saying "The great are selfless" applies to Dr. Chung.



My contact with Dr. Chung, with his integrity and purity of heart, reminds me of the great hero who saved 16th-century Korea, Admiral Yi Sunsin. He was the brilliant naval commander who stopped the Japanese military ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi's savage invasion of Korea (1592-98). This year marks the 400th anniversary of Chung's death. His name is known to everyone in Korea, but most non-Koreans have never heard of him.

I will share his story to help further our understanding of the Korean people and their history.



Admiral Yi was 47 when the battle with Toyotomi's forces began. At the time, he was no more than a regional navy commander. But as soon as he learned that the Japanese forces were advancing, he called the naval officers under his command for a strategic council. At this early stage, the Japanese forces had a strong advantage, their attack taking the Korean defense forces by surprise.

The majority of naval officers at the emergency meeting were reluctant to engage in any action. Many argued that the region they were responsible for defending had not been attacked, and that it was sufficient that they simply protect their own area.

Admiral Yi blasted them roundly: "When your country is in danger, how can you foist the responsibility of defense on the officers and troops of other regions!"

Not wanting to take responsibility is one of the deplorable traits of bureaucratism. Admiral Yi's fight began with trying to transform his colleagues' attitude. He insisted that it was the duty of each and every leader to stand up and bear full responsibility for victory or defeat.



The naval troops under his command were remarkably successful. The ironclad vessels known as Turtle Ships, built according to his specifications, were particularly impressive. These were covered with heavy metal plates, like tortoise shells. Not only did they deflect the enemy's arrows, they were designed so that guns and cannons could be fired from them.

While military leaders in other regions sat back, convinced that a Japanese invasion could never happen, Admiral Yi set about carefully preparing a strong defensive force.



The farsighted admiral was subsequently given wide command over Korea's naval troops. But in 1597, he became the victim of a plot hatched by those jealous of his achievements; he was imprisoned. The person who had worked hardest for his country was falsely branded a traitor. This infamous scheme, fueled by envy, sought to topple the very pillar of Korea.

Admiral Yi, however, was undaunted. When his jailer urged him to pay bribes to win his freedom, he refused point-blank: "I do not seek to prolong my life by wrongdoing."

The Korean people loved the admiral and are said to have gathered outside the prison gates. They were his true allies.

And without Admiral Yi at the helm, the Korean navy reeled from one harsh blow after another. At last everyone realized that his leadership had made the navy what it had been. Even those who plotted his downfall had to admit that Admiral Yi was their only hope.

The winds of praise and censure always blow. But Admiral Yi didn't let such things disturb him; he resumed his position as commander; he knew he had a mission to fulfill.



The war had taken a turn for the worse, and the navy, which had prided itself on being invincible, had only 12 ships left. The enemy forces, meanwhile, boasted more than 10 times that number. No one thought the Korean forces stood a chance of victory.

But the losers in any struggle have already allowed themselves to be defeated before the battle even begins. They have lost to the insidious workings of resignation, cowardice and lethargy in their own hearts.

Admiral Yi called out to the Korean people, "As long as I am alive, I promise you, I will not permit our foes to have their way!" It was a resounding declaration of utter confidence, of his triumph.

The strength and conviction of his words drove the defeatist attitude from his men's hearts and roused them to fight. "If we fight at the admiral's side, we are sure to win!" they thought. The valorous struggle of the admiral and his troops, burning with the passionate desire to win at all costs, eventually led to the crushing defeat of the enemy fleet.



Admiral Yi did not fight for the sake of power or wealth. His was a battle for what was right, a selfless struggle to protect and save his people and his country. That was the secret of his nobility and strength.

People have often ridiculed us, saying things like, "Only the wind, earthquakes and the Soka Gakkai work for free." But such comments actually come from their astonishment at the power generated by people selflessly working together for the benefit of society and their fellow human beings in this world dominated by self-profit and self-aggrandizement.

A strong alliance of people working for the good of all, for truth and justice, without self-interest — this force will raise the curtain on a new century of humanity.

There is no greater strategy than the Mystic Law. The power of the champions of the people, working to achieve the grand ideal of kosen-rufu, is limitless.

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