

Korean Impressions

by

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From March 20 to 25, 1997, Dr. Rodenhuis, on the invitation of KCID, visited Korea for the International Symposium on the 「Efficient Operation and Management of Fresh Water Reservoir and Environmental Considerations on the Reservoir Watershed」, where he gave a key-note address on the development of water resources management in The Netherlands.

As member of a group of symposium participants, he participated in a field trip to various sites on the West coast, including the Saemankeum project area. Below Dr. Rodenhuis gives his impression of his visit to Korea.

The sun rises over the morning mist while we are driving out from the city of Kun San. I now understand why Korea is called 'the land of the morning calm'.

I have visited Korea several times in the past, but these visits were mostly confined to large cities, this is my first trip into the countryside. The morning view is beautiful, fields and small bushes around us, mountains loom further away in the morning mist, small farm houses in the fields. I am intrigued by the small mounts that I see near to these houses, all placed in neatly cared for plots. My companion

explains that these are burial mounts. In viewing this scenery I contemplate that the Korean people must have a history of living in harmony with nature and with the spirits of the land, it is a theme I shall come back to.

My first impression of this field trip is the contrast between the bustling, but rather bare city of Seoul where one does not see much greenery, and this countryside dotted with small stands of bushes and trees, with green mountains in the distance. It is early in the season, but I imagine that later in the year this country

must be very green. Why then can't we bring back some nature to the cities?

Another powerful impression is the bustling energy that is apparent everywhere in Korea. In the cities and the country, construction work everywhere. More particularly am I impressed by the keen interest of my Korean colleagues during the KCID symposium and the powerful drive for developments by the Rural Development Corporation and its energetic president. The achievements become very clear during the visit to RDC's exhibition centre. The developments inland of reservoirs and irrigation schemes and the large reclamation projects along the West coast mark the spirit of a keen drive for an improvement of conditions for the country and for its people. My companions, one professor from China and one from Japan, and I myself, all familiar with large projects in our own country, do appreciate what is being achieved here and are deeply impressed.

That this development work is more than the large engineering projects becomes apparent when we visit a large complex of glass houses where roses are being cultivated according to the most modern methods. Walking through these glass houses I can easily imagine myself back in The Netherlands where we have similar complexes; I discover a flower cutting machine manufactured in The Netherlands. So, tidal reclamation and

flowers, although at different sides of the globe, Korea and The Netherlands have much in common.

When we come to the West coast I begin to really appreciate the scale of the engineering projects that are presently undertaken in Korea. The Kum estuary barrage with the modern control centre is already a good indication. When looking out over the estuary and its mud flats I can also see some of the engineering challenges that my Korean colleagues must deal with. I imagine one such challenge to be the proper management of the sediments in the estuary; it is a subject that I would have liked to discuss somewhat further with my Korean colleagues.

The visit the Saemankeum project crowns our field trip. I am happy to see that RDC has established a large visitor's centre with project information panels, and a highly professional video presentation. In many countries large engineering projects are executed without informing the general public. As these projects in the end become part of their lives, we feel in The Netherlands that we must involve the people right from the start of major projects, even allowing them to comment in the design phase.

The scale of the Saemankeum reclamation matches that of some of the reclamation projects in The Netherlands. The method of construction is, due to the

presence of abundant amounts of rock in Korea - and the absence of it in The Netherlands - quite different. The sea dike is constructed by dumping large amounts of rock, in The Netherlands we have to make do mostly with sand and clay. Although the availability of construction material seems to make the job somewhat easier, the tidal ranges here are about 1.5 to 2 times higher than in The Netherlands, making the closure works more difficult.

When looking over the plans for the land use in the reclaimed area, my earlier thoughts about the history of the Korean people living in harmony with nature and the land come back to me. In the plans I see straight canals, lined with concrete along their embankments. Quite a contrast to the countryside we have been travelling through earlier. The execution of reclamation projects along the West coast show that Korean engineers have mastered the engineering task of 'keeping one's feet dry'. Perhaps now the time has come to explore further possibilities of creating assets of natural values in the projects, in order that by doing so something is given back to nature, to balance that what has been taken away in the process of reclamation.

A canal does not have to be exactly as straight as we engineers like to draw it with our sharp pointed pencils. Its conveyance function can also be achieved if we allow it to meander slightly and create more natural vegetation along its embankment. Undoubtedly the animals in the water, the birds flying above it and the people strolling along its bank would appreciate if we were to construct it in a more natural way. So, perhaps our engineering task should get a wider scope. We should consider it our responsibility not only to make sure that a project is technically feasible and safe, we should also build with nature to recreate within a project what we must take away somewhere else. So, at the end of our field trip I find that I have arrived again at the theme of my key note address : (water) resources should be considered and managed integrally. ●

편집자 주

이 글은 지난 3월 22일 「세계 물의 날」기념 국제심포지엄 개최시 특별강연자로 초빙되어 발표한 바 있는 네덜란드 델프트 수리연구소의 G.S. Rodenhuis 박사가 본국으로 귀국 후 한국 방문의 느낀 소감을 보내왔기에 때 늦은 감이 있으나 우리 회원들과 더불어 함께 그 감흥을 느껴 보고자 본 지에 게재하였다.

