

## Returning to roots, building future through culture; pathways to compatriot solidarity

"A homeland is not just a place; it is a memory, a root, a heart."

More than 100 years ago, in the Russian province of Primorsky Krai, our ancestors left their homes and took root in an unfamiliar land. Despite losing everything, they held on to one belief: "Our children at least should be educated." They worked day and night, learning, building communities and finding a role in society, even if it meant giving up their own lives in order to leave better lives for their children.

As a result of their sacrifices, generations of Koryo-in have been recognized for their education and responsible citizenship in every country. Today, Koryo people living in the CIS countries, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia, are among the most educated, trusted and proud citizens of their respective countries.

They have become active members of their societies and have upheld the honor of their people.

However, in the land they call home, their achievements have not been fully realized. Today, there are more than 110,000 Koryo-in living in South Korea, and the number is growing steadily every year. They have willingly returned to their homeland, but what awaits them is not what they expected. The first barrier they encounter is the language barrier. But that doesn't explain all the difficulties. Differences in culture and mentality, unfamiliarity with the rules of life, lack of understanding of the system and even subtle discriminatory gazes. All of these factors combine to make settlement for Koryo-in difficult.

Although various institutions and organizations are providing Korean language education throughout the country, the real challenge of integration remains. It is not just about learning the language but also understanding and empathizing with the history, culture, social norms and lifestyle of Korean society so that we can become a single "us" living together in this land. Therefore, what is needed now is not just a fragmentary Korean language education but an integrated education that addresses language and culture,



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identity and community.

In this reality, the Koryo-in Global Network (KGN) is more than just a support organization for overseas compatriots. They aim to not only help Koryo immigrants settle in Korea but also to become true partners in helping them become self-reliant, contribute to society and pass on their pride to the next generation. Through a variety of activities, including Korean language education, historical and cultural experiences, life adaptation programs, youth scholarships and global networking, they are laying the foundation for a "society of living together."

However, there are still institutional barriers. The most prominent is the visa system. Currently, most Koryo compatriots enter and stay in the country on either an H-2 or F-4 visa, but there are clear differences between the two

visas in terms of rights, restrictions and security of stay. In particular, the H-2 visa is limited to blue-collar jobs, and many restrictions on occupation and residency status prevent many Koryo-in from fulfilling their potential. Equal treatment of all Koryo-in, regardless of nationality, education or age, within a unified visa system for compatriots is not just a matter of administrative efficiency; it is a matter of attitude and philosophy in how Korea treats its overseas compatriots.

Settlement is not just an immigration policy. It's about creating a sense of belonging and building a future together. KGN is committed to upholding the very essence of resettlement and sees compatriots not just as people to help but as partners to build a future with. Helping Koryo compatriots regain their roots in this land is also a response to the question of what kind of country Korea wants to be.

Just as a small seed can take root and grow into a large tree, the seeds of understanding and solidarity we plant today will eventually grow into a large tree that will change the future of all of us. And that tree surely will become another hope grown together by the Koryo people and the Republic of Korea. 

\* The contributor's claims or opinions may differ from the position of the Overseas Koreans Agency.