

‘If we don’t know our own language and culture, we are like a tree without roots’

**Victor Nam, third-generation Koryo-saram and Overseas Koreans Foundation scholarship recipient, president of Tashkent campus of Russian univ.
‘Republic of Korea is my roots, and sharing its values is my mission; power to preserve my identity lies in language and culture’**

“The most powerful way to preserve our identity is to learn and share the Korean language and culture.”

Nam Viktor (49), president of the Tashkent campus of the Herzen State Pedagogical University in Russia, emphasized in a written interview with Yonhap News, “Korea is my roots, and sharing its values is my current duty and mission.”

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, he is a third-generation Koryo-saram. He completed elementary, middle and high school at a local Koryoin school. In 1993, he enrolled in the Korean Language Education Department at the Nizami State Pedagogical University in Tashkent. Upon graduating in 1998, he was selected as a scholarship recipient by the Overseas Koreans Foundation, the predecessor of the Overseas Koreans Agency.

While studying in Korea, he completed his master’s degree at Kyung Hee University and later earned a doctorate in Korean language education from Seoul National University. He said that while he faced challenges early on in his studies, he solidified his academic foundation through interactions with Korean professors.

‘Focusing on what I loved opened doors’

After returning to Uzbekistan, he began his teaching career in Korean language education at his alma mater. In 2018, he was appointed the inaugural president of the newly opened Tashkent Bucheon University. While the presidency of a new university was challenging, he achieved three key objectives over the past six years.

“First, campus remodeling; second, student recruitment and departmental establishment; and third, faculty recruitment. The remodeling took three years, and later, we received additional land from the government, which allowed us to open an IT campus.”

The student body, initially 400, grew to 2,000. Nine departments were established, and faculty members traveled back and forth from Korea to build the university.

“We raised salaries to attract talented professors, which in turn



Nam Viktor, president of the Tashkent campus of Herzen Pedagogical University in Russia

led to increased student enrollment,” Nam said.

Following this, in July of last year, he was appointed president of Herzen University’s Tashkent campus by the Uzbek Prime Minister’s Office. Having studied in his home country on a scholarship from the Overseas Koreans Foundation, he has maintained a strong academic and educational background, ultimately becoming a leading educator in his home country.

From scholarship recipient to chancellor of university: third-generation Koryoin’s educational leadership

Herzen University’s Tashkent campus is a joint Russian-Uzbek educational institution.

“Currently, we have about 1,000 students, and once the nine-story lecture hall and dormitory building are completed in September, the enrollment will increase to 3,000,” Nam said.

He expressed a strong commitment to establishing a Korean Language Department, saying, “We plan to pursue its establishment through bilateral consultations.”

Nam noted that Koryoin youth are currently facing many challenges in their career paths. He expressed concern, saying: “Koryo youth are living through truly difficult times. University graduation is not immediately leading to stable employment, and the international situation is unstable.”

He also emphasized the importance of experiencing Korean language and culture in our children’s education, citing it as a key to preserving their roots.

“If we don’t know your language and culture, we’ll be like a tree without roots. I learned Korean late in life, but I’m making sure our children learn it naturally from a young age.

“The Overseas Koreans Agency’s Motherland Invitational Training Program is a tremendously helpful program for education in our roots,” he said, encouraging active participation.

‘Don’t give up on what you love’

He said the Korean Wave is also raging locally. As president of Bucheon University, he personally planned active cultural events, including Korean speech contests and K-pop concerts.

“Students become interested in Korea through Korean Wave content and want to learn Korean,” he said. “Connecting this interest with academics is essential for effective education.”

He also expressed gratitude to the Overseas Koreans Agency (Commissioner Lee Sang-duk) and the Overseas Koreans Cooperation Center (Director Kim Young-geun).

“The invitation and scholarship programs for next-generation Koreans, as well as the training and dispatch of Korean language teachers, are providing a great boost to the overseas Korean community,” he said. “I hope that by increasing the budget, more of the next generation can connect with their homeland.”

Finally, he offered advice to the next generation of overseas Koreans.

“If you consistently pursue what you truly love and excel at, opportunities will surely come your way. Don’t hesitate and confidently forge your own unique path.” 📖



Bucheon University students perform at a K-pop concert personally planned by Nam Viktor during his tenure as president of Bucheon University in Tashkent in 2023.



The first graduation ceremony of Bucheon University in Tashkent



The Jaseng Medical Foundation presents scholarships to Bucheon University students, following a joint medical volunteer program between the Jaseng Medical Foundation and Bucheon University in 2023. Nam Viktor is third from the left.