

Being appointed as an Ambassador to the Netherlands for the first time, I was very curious about how the youth in the Netherlands are learning about the Republic of Korea. But the moment I saw Dutch elementary school textbooks, I was in complete shock.

The information included in the textbook was a two-line sentence saying ‘**The Republic of Korea is bordered by the sea, so The fishing industry is important in Korea and fish prepped by cheap wages are sold.**’ together with a single photograph of fish on display at the fish market.

The amount of coverage in textbooks was 12 pages for China, 4 pages for Korea, and the Republic of Korea was only 2 lines ...

<Before Correction> Dutch elementary school geography textbook (6th grade)

With the image of a traditional fish market, Korea was described as a fishing country.

<After Correction> Dutch elementary school geography textbook (6th grade) With the image of a worker handling cutting-edge equipment, Korea was introduced as a highly industrialized country.

Compared to the Republic of Korea’s international status now, seeing an absurdly scarce volume of content about the country made me feel heavy-hearted. So I decided to let the people of the Netherlands know properly about Korea by correcting the contents related to Korea in textbooks.

It was very challenging to change the contents in textbooks since the more contents there are about the Republic of Korea, the more contents about other countries needed to be reduced.

First, I found out the period in which the textbook will be reissued. After looking into textbook issuing periods for each publisher, I visited the publisher in which the reissuing period was the closest. Then, I examined whether or not the Netherlands has had a tie with the Republic of Korea, to explain what kinds of benefits will be given to the Netherlands when the contents about Korea in textbooks are corrected.

The first thing I discovered was the Netherlands’ involvement in the Korean War. After the Korean War, the Republic of Korea was in ruins and was once the poorest country in the world, but it grew and became the 10th economic powerhouse in the

world and joined the OECD. It is also the only one among 80 countries that became independent after WWII which achieved both economic growth and democracy at the same level as that of the European Union.

I explained that the story of the Republic of Korea which made accomplishments in only half a century – which took 300 years for developed countries in the West – will give students in the Netherlands an entrepreneurial spirit, challenge, and hope, and also instill in their minds the dream that they too can become the leading role in bringing change to the global village just like Korea did.

In addition, it can give the youth the lesson that **‘The fate of a country depends on the will, effort and attitude of its people.’**

I told that more than anything else, the Republic of Korea is not forgetting the sacrifices made by the Netherlands that fought in the Korean War 70 years ago,- and that the students can have pride about their home country when they learn about how Korea – helped by the Netherlands – transformed into a developed country.

I also mentioned how the Republic of Korea is contributing to the economy of the Netherlands.

I emphasized the fact that Korean companies entered the Netherlands selling cell phones, TVs, and refrigerators,- and that favorable public opinion is growing thanks to the Korean companies’ supply of approximately 40,000 jobs in the Netherlands. I said that the Dutch people’s heightened interest in Korea will lead to a sales increase of relevant publications.

I can still remember the shining eyes of Dutch textbook publisher employees at the moment when I introduced that “The story of the economic development of the Republic of Korea has ‘a global historical meaning’ and will help the youth of the Netherlands grow into world leaders.”

Thus, contents about the democracy and economic development of the Republic of Korea were added in two examination books with the highest market share in the Netherlands as well as in the middle school geography textbook. Out of 120 pages of the textbook, it covered 6 pages.

In three Dutch middle school geography and history textbooks, there is the following:
‘The Republic of Korea was able to initiate both economic development and democratization, which serves as a good example for other developing countries. Korea is a highly industrialized country, an economic powerhouse, and it exports high-tech smartphones, digital TVs, cars, and large vessels.’

Until the inclusion of contents about the development of the Republic of Korea – making Korea ‘a highly industrialized nation’ instead of ‘a fishing country’ – The voluntary participation of overseas Koreans was of great help. One overseas Korean reported and analyzed the contents of the Dutch textbook, and one overseas Korean created and translated the material that could be used to persuade the publisher.

When the news that the proud history of the Republic of Korea is described directly in the textbook was spread, overseas Koreans in the Netherlands said that their pride about the Republic of Korea became higher,- and that their children also had a higher sense of identity about Korea as well.

The image of the Republic of Korea that is elevated through foreign textbooks will also contribute to the entry of the children of overseas Koreans into mainstream society. Introducing the Republic of Korea correctly in textbooks all over the world will change Korea and the world.

The active involvement and participation of everyone – overseas Koreans – is necessary for the important activity of creating Korea that is proud to the world.

We are Koreans, We are proud Honorary Ambassadors of Korea.