
EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ilpyong Kim Interview Narrative

4-3-2007 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

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Ilpyong Kim

4-3-2007 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Personal Background

I was born in Korea in 1930. It was in the spring, and I grew up there. Since it was 1930, it was during the Japanese occupation of Korea, so I grew up and went to primary school, which was pretty much in Japanese, using the Japanese way of teaching.

In my second year of middle school -- at time I was about 15 -- the World War II ended. From there on, I was in the Korean middle school system, finished six years, that is three years of middle school and three years of high school, and went into Seoul National University.

That year, in 1950, the Korean War started. Thus I went into the military service, and after a brief training at the Officers Candidate School, I was commissioned lieutenant and assigned to the front line. During my service I translated the address of General James Van Fleet who was the Eighth U. S. Army Commanding General before President Syngman Rhee of the Republic of Korea. It was from English into Korean, and then when he was leaving Korea for the United States for new assignment in 1953, that was almost at the end of the Korean War, and the armistice or cease-fire was negotiated at Panmunjom.

Then I was awarded the U.S. Bronze Star medal for my distinguished service in the Korean Army. My duty in the military was to translate from English into Korean and Korean into English but occasionally from Japanese into English. All these documents were related to the military operations.

Following the armistice agreement in July 1953 I was invited to the United States to finish my college degree. After preparing myself to start my college again I came to the United States. After finishing four years of my college work I was admitted to the Graduate School of Columbia University in New York. After finishing all my coursework I passed the general exam to begin research on my Ph.D. dissertation.

Intellectual Innovations

Institute of Advanced Projects

At that time, Professor Glenn Paige of Princeton University was coming to the Institute of Advanced Projects of the East-West Center where he organized a group of scholars which was to conduct research on the role of public administration in the economic development of Asian countries. This group included Glenn Paige, and Fred Riggs and Bill Siffin from Indiana University, and then there was one professor from Korea, Dong Suh Park from the Graduate School of Public Administration, and then there was one public administration professor from Tokyo, Ide Yoshinori. Also one scholar each from Taiwan, Pakistan, India participated. It was diverse group but attempted a comparative study on the role of bureaucracy in developing countries.

The Asian professors were able to interact with the American professors despite the cultural and language handicaps.

So as my first job after finishing my Ph.D. program, I was able to serve as the research associate. It was my job to create an intellectual atmosphere where the East can meet the West. It was my role to create the atmosphere in which the Asian and American scholars meet and understand each other. It was also my duty to write the summary of what has been discussed each session and then set up the agenda for the next meeting. It was a

kind of advanced seminar in which the American scholars might learn the administrative culture from the Asian scholars, and the Asian scholars might learn about public policymaking and techniques of public administration from the American experts. It was very interesting to see Eastern and the Western culture interacting and how their thinking as well as approaches were sharpened with comparative perspectives. I served a moderating role about a year and half from 1963, and then I was awarded the Fulbright Research Fellowship to go to Hong Kong and Taiwan to conduct research on my Ph.D. dissertation. Thus I finished my job at East-West Center and got a teaching job as assistant professor of Government at Indiana University. That was in 1965.

Life at EWC

Early 1960s

[Editor's note: Dr. Kim discussed the model of collaborative discussion at the Center.]

I think it was in the early phase of institutional development of the East-West Center. The Center was set up in 1961, during the Kennedy Administration with the support of the federal government. In those days, I recall the scholars were very good at interacting with each other.

The scholars from Asia learned a great deal about the modern American way of conducting discussions on public policy and public administration and the American scholars provided good advice to the Asian scholars.

However, the Asian scholars were trained domestically and had difficulty in understanding the Western way. However, some of them spent a year or more in England, or in the West and there was lively discussion or interaction between East and

West although there was quite bit of communication problem especially for those from Taiwan, Hong Kong or Japan.

Scholars who came from Pakistan, India or Philippines had no problem in their conversation with Americans since they spoke English fluently. One scholar from Taiwan and another from Hong Kong were able to communicate well since they were educated in England. Thus it was a challenge as well as a good example of collaborative work.

We were hoping that each would write an article or chapter for a book on public administration. I don't know if the summary write-up that I have written each week could have been a source of an edited volume. However, in those days the visiting scholars were not doing serious research nor committed to the publication of any scholarly work. They were more interested in interaction and mutual understanding between Asian and American scholars and learning from each other.

In that sense, I think that in the early phase of the East-West Center, the development of the intellectual program was excellent. I have to give credit to the East-West Center which was able to recruit many of the younger scholars from various levels of graduate studies. They came and received their M.A. degree, and returned home. Most of them were college graduates in their home country, and they had jobs such as instructors in colleges or high schools. Some of them were teaching at military academy. They were coming to the East-West Center on leave from their jobs. Many of them, after getting M.A. from the East-West Center, went on to the mainland to work toward their Ph.D. degrees. Then they became the faculty members in universities.

So I think the East-West Center in the early period in the 1960s, made great contribution to the developing countries of Asia for the development of intellectual resources from which the economic development and industrialization was launched.

Graduate Program, 1960s

[Dr. Kim returned to the EWC as a POSCO Fellow in 2007 and reflected on his experience as a graduate student at the Center in the 1960s.]

I was living in one of the apartments on Wilder Avenue.

Some grad students who were spending time here were in that apartment complex.

Some of the students I knew quite well. I run into them in Japan and in Korea. And sometimes, those who returned and came back and finished their Ph.D. degrees and teaching in the United States.

I met a couple of people in Japan, and also several people in Seoul, maybe more than a couple, at an academic conference, who are graduates of East-West Center. They spent a year or two at East-West Center in their early career.

I think, in old days, I found scholars spent longer time here but nowadays, two-month to four-month scholarly research here. I think this is much better. You can have more people participate in the East-West project, that is really good, but sometimes, in earlier period, they spend almost two years or a year and a half, and took longer period of stay. However, I think the shorter period gives them much better impetus to do work.

(laughter) And that is good since the students coming here have to finish their training in a short period of time. In those days, they spent one year on campus at East-West Center in dormitory, and then another year was spent in the mainland, they combined two years under the fellowship for M.A. program.

Yeah, they spent here one year, and then they were sent to the mainland in order to complete their graduate degrees from certain university. I don't know this program may have had advantage because in those days, they thought Hawai'i was a bit underdeveloped compared to the mainland, but Hawai'i is quite advanced now, equal to or even better than the mainland universities. Now they could come to Hawai'i and spend a year or half-year and receive the graduate education equal to what they will be getting from the higher institution in the mainland. In that sense, East-West Center has advanced much better.

Best Memories

My pleasant and good memory here was meeting new friends from East and West. Some of my friends who were at the level of writing their Ph.D. dissertation, came here to search for the topic for dissertation. They came out here to look for the topic which is dealing with East-West relations or comparative study of East and West. For example, John Singleton was writing his dissertation on the comparative education in Japan for University of Pittsburgh. Another person I knew was working on his Ph.D. dissertation on comparative public administration for Duke University. Both worked at the East-West Center and did some kind of administrative job. Lincoln Hall housed the Institute of Advanced Projects, the visiting scholars' offices in those days. A couple of people I knew from the East-West Center, after finishing M.A., went to the mainland to work toward Ph.D. and became professors. Many other alumni of East-West Center returned to their homeland and became professors and professionals. So, in that sense, East-West Center made significant contribution to our thinking of how to integrate or synthesize East and West. So the East-West Center functioned as the

incubator for many Americans who became Asian specialists and Asians who introduced American culture to Asia.

EWC's Impact

Changing Students' Perspectives

I think in the beginning, the East-West Center staff and faculty members, mostly from the University of Hawai‘i, didn't know how to deal with the different cultures and the diversity of students, even though Hawai‘i is a melting pot of many diverse races and cultures.

Another problem was how to maintain harmony among the Asian students who were culturally and racially diverse. They came from very different cultural backgrounds, and the language barrier was enormous even though they were able to speak English. After all, the East-West Center was the pivotal place for exchange of ideas and exchange of culture and learn from each other more. Moreover, in those days, nationalism was very strong and they tended to cling to their own national cultures rather than trying to learn about and adapt to the American culture.

Some of the Asian students who were educated under the British colonial rule tended to be more nationalistic and more critical of American policy contrasting the British imperialism. They were afraid that America has become great power inheriting the colonialism of Great Britain thus they tend to be critical of America.

However, they gradually overcame the fear and eventually acquired the understanding of the United States and the West after two years of education and acculturation at East-West Center. Thus, I think the East-West Center brought about the changes in the

students' misperceptions about the United States and the West, during the two years of education here.

On Career, Perspectives

I think I did change a great deal. I served in the Army during the Korean War and I was not so positive about the United States in those days. But after being here, learning more about the way other Asians think about the United States and coming to understand what the United States really is, I have changed my views.

We tended to have misperceptions about the United States, so my stay here helped change my views about the United States. When I was here, that was in November 1963, we heard on the news that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. In those days, we didn't have direct service of news on the television. Nor did we have the internet as we do now. In those days we tried to catch the mainland news by staying up in the evening to view the news on TV when the newsreel was shipped from the West Coast late in the evening. Nowadays you can see instantly what's happening in the mainland U.S.A. and for that matter around the world. However, in those days, Hawai'i served as a linkage between the West and East, not only in culture but also in communications.

Throughout my academic career [*as an international relations specialist*], because of my spending a couple years here at East-West Center really made me to think in terms of East-West comparison, or East-West relations, and how to bridge the gap between the Asian way of thinking and the Western way of thinking. So I became to think and to look at East and West more comparatively and try to search for similarities that could be integrated or synthesized into one universal culture. Such a way of thinking and approach is the result of my spending [*time*] at East-West Center.

I think the way I have changed from parochial thinking to more universal way of thinking was direct influence of the East-West Center and also impact of the multicultural Hawai‘i. Therefore, I tend to think in term of integration of the East and West, and that in my teaching career whenever I teach an international relations course, I tend to provide East-West comparison or present the Asian cases to help the American students understand Asia better, stressing that there is no such thing as the “East and the West and the twain shall never meet.” But, I would say “yes” the two can meet and collaborate or work together for better understanding of East and West which will ultimately bring about the world peace.

[Most of Dr. Kim’s teaching career, from 1970 to 1997, was as a professor of political science at the University of Connecticut.]

I learned from the East-West Center, East and West is not separate entity but these two can meet and promote the understanding of each other, and also, the East could learn the Western techniques while the Western students can learn about the Asian culture and values.

Ties That Last

Connection to Hawai‘i

[Dr. Kim’s daughter was born in Hawai‘i.]

That's why whenever we traveled to Asia we stop over in Honolulu. In those days, the airlines from New York or from Midwest went to L.A. or San Francisco and then stopped over in Honolulu first, then on to Japan and to Seoul. In that sense, it was very convenient to stop by Hawai‘i.

Thus our children really have this tie and sense of being Hawaiian since she was born here, and our children want to stop by here deliberately even though there is a direct flight now from New York to Seoul or to Tokyo. Moreover, when I had sabbatical leave going to Tokyo, where I spent one year in 1977 at Tokyo University on the Fulbright grant, we stopped over Hawai‘i and spent a few days. Also, when I spent one year under the Fulbright lectureship at Seoul National University in 1990s, I took my family including the daughter who was born here in 1964 and we spent a few days here. She really enjoys stopping by here because she found her birthplace and she senses her cultural affinity.

Future EWC Priorities

I get the impression that the East-West Center is now moving toward the study of Pacific Islands and some people may feel the mainland Asia is neglected. But many more conferences and academic research and the study focusing on the Pacific Islands may be needed since the East-West Center is located in the Pacific.

However, on the other hand, if you do focus on Pacific Islands, you may lose the broader perspective of the world history and world politics. The Pacific Islands studies should be cast in the larger and broader perspective of world politics or world history so that the people of Pacific Islands, including Hawai‘i, may be able to relate themselves to the world and feel they are also part of world affairs.

Also, I believe the East-West Center brought many of the American mainland scholars, who never studied nor were aware of Asia before, and became aware of the Pacific Islands history and also learned a great deal more about the history of Hawai‘i.

So in that sense, the East-West Center made huge contribution, but what I am afraid is, they become too much parochial. We should avoid parochial way, just focusing on Pacific Islands but broaden the curriculum so that people from other countries or from the mainland America have a good understanding of this area. What I am afraid is that the East-West Center may become an island institution rather than an international university serving the people coming from Pacific Islands as well as from many other lands. The Asians come here to learn more about the United States and the Americans learn more about Asia.

Keep the regional focus on one hand, and yet the regional studies should be done in the international context. Give the opportunity for the Pacific Island people to know about the United States mainland and more on Asia.

What I am saying is that instead of parochially focusing on Pacific Islands the study should be broad enough to cast into the world context.

But I find that even on Hawai‘i, the Center for Hawaiian Studies here, at UH, seem to be making a great progress. I stopped by the Center, and have a look at their curriculum, and try to understand what they are doing. It seems the Center is doing a wonderful job and it is designed to be helpful to the Hawai‘i people. They should know more about Hawaiian history and culture, which is great!

We have covered a wide range of issues concerning the East-West Center. The Center was set up in 1960, so it's over 40 years and reaching almost a half-century. It is about time to let the world know about the East-West Center and the East-West Center's contribution to better understanding between East and West, and in that sense, I think

East-West Center should continue to prosper and continue to be productive, and continue to make contributions to our world understanding.

Personal Legacy

I want to be remembered as a Korean originally coming from Asia and try to understand the West and America, and then try to combine and integrate the best of East and the best of West to make a whole knowledge of the world. Thus I am not parochially Korean but really a world citizen.