

# **The Role and the Vision of Island Universities in the Asia-Pacific Region for a Sustainable Island Development**

**Song Seok-eon, President of Jeju National University**

First of all, it is with great honor to be present at this Jeju Forum as the president of Jeju National University, which is a representative national university of Jeju Island. In particular, I am very pleased to have this valuable opportunity to have this discussion with the presidents of the island universities on the theme of the vision and role of the island universities of Asia Pacific region for sustainable island development proposed by Jeju National University.

It is no exaggeration to say that mankind lives on land composed of giant islands surrounded by the ocean which occupies 71% of the earth's total land mass. Almost all countries in Asia other than the ones in Central Asia in particular are geographically surrounded by waters including the Pacific Ocean. These Asian islands are taking up the task of managing their own unique territories in their own intrinsic ways.

Islands are characterized by the fact that they are surrounded by the sea on all sides making the rise and fall of its industries and cultures governed by the ocean. In this respect, islands have two distinct characteristics. They may be isolated areas surrounded by the sea, but they are also areas possessing the infinite potentials of expansion and openness that can reach out to the whole world via the ocean route.

In other words, islands are areas that can be limited and restrained but it also has the ambilaterality of having infinite possibilities to challenge themselves to new innovations. Depending on the perspective of these challenges and restrictions, islands can move on to the path of prosperity or that of decline.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the British Empire developed into a world-class nation where the "sun never sets" by choosing to follow the spirit of being the land of challenge and prosperity and not just an isolated island nation. In this respect, all island regions and island countries in Asia need to pursue sustainable prosperity of the island by meeting the philosophy of challenge and expansion in the maritime age of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Islands tend to have many local vulnerabilities such as its isolated nature, limited resources, water scarcity and marine pollution. However, these vulnerabilities can be used to solve various problems wisely much more effectively than geographically open and widespread continents, by utilizing the strong network of cooperation and coexistence

amongst island cultures.

Based on the solidarity and cooperative spirit of island cultures, the international expansion through the sea and the establishment of organic interrelationships with other regions will further develop the global culture and civilization connected with the rest of the world and islands will no longer exist as an isolated or a restricted location.

The complex situation of nationalism and neo-liberal globalization which has recently been accompanied by rapid changes in inter-Korean affairs will enable the open and communicative island cultures based on maritime culture to resolve multi-lateral problems in politics, economics, society and culture through cooperation and interdependency than any other times in history.

At the heart of islands' communication and prosperity is the island university which serves as the central core brain. Island universities have a great responsibility to nurture and cultivate global talents, to protect and study all sciences, civilization and traditional culture including land and ocean. This multi-level role of the island universities is not only linked to island regions but also directly linked to the whole world in all areas of politics, economy, society and cultures.

The islands' change and innovation depend on the universities. All talents of the universities move on to different fields within the islands and are the mainstay of their development. Therefore, island universities should not only pursue research and education appropriate to the characteristics of the island, but also establish a network with all domestic universities and abroad and endeavor to make continuous efforts for research and education.

Jeju National University is expanding its academic exchanges with island universities while also currently working with University of Hawaii and University of Guam in USA, Ryukyu University in Japan, Hainan University in China, Udayana University in Bali, Indonesia and the Western Philippines University in the Philippines. It plans to strengthen its network by expanding its reach to other island universities such as in Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Recent global climate change is causing rapid changes in global marine ecosystems. In addition, the marine environment affected by micro-plastics and coastal environmental pollution is rapidly deteriorating and even worse, it is spreading to Polar Regions including Antarctica. This presents a serious challenge in improving the quality of human life, a key challenge for the sustainable development of the Earth which is one of the most important agendas of the UN.

In order to take measure against such global environmental changes, the island universities which are in an important position to understand and study the marine environment should play a central role. This is because the island universities have the geopolitical characteristics of being the bridgehead in marine research and are able to witness the universal marine and ecological changes firsthand the fastest. Therefore, it is only natural that island universities take the initiative for ecological researches centered on maritime activities.

It is hoped that the island university forum that has been launched today will make a great contribution in finding ways to address the global problem. It may be that only a few presidents of island universities are in attendance today but this event is sure to become the cornerstone which protects the earth's future. This forum may just be a small step towards the ultimate aim but the historical implications of this event is in this president's opinion to be immensely significant. Utmost efforts will be given on my part so that these expectations can be lived up to.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes out to President Elsa Manapaarc of the Western Philippines University, President Ueng Jinn-pyng of the National Penghu University of Science and Technology and Professor Austin Shelton the third of the University of Guam and President Koh Chung-suk of the Jeju International University who have generously agreed to give their valuable time in contribution to this venture.