

## The Diplomacy of Korean Paper Folding Art

When we check the meaning of the word "diplomacy," we see that it is the work of maintaining good relations between governments of different countries. Yes, for sure, one of those good relations is between Korean and Indonesia through the art of paper folding and paper sculpture, which in Korean is called *jongi jeobgi*. The Korean art of paper folding not only introduces Korean esthetics to the world, but also promotes peace around the world.

People in Indonesia who previously knew only the Japanese word *origami*, which in Bahasa Indonesia translated as *melipat kertas*, have been recently introduced to the Korean art of paper folding by a number of artists brought together by the Korean Paper Culture Foundation. For many Indonesians, from kindergarten students through to adults, they learned how to fold paper into artworks as an extracurricular activity. Unfortunately, most children, and even adults, too, don't understand that while folding the pieces of paper into works of art, they're exercising their creativity.

When she came to Surabaya, Indonesia, in early October 2016 to promote this heritage art form, Rho Young-Hye, chairperson of the World Jongi Jeobgi Organization, said that our hands are our outer brains that sharpen the creativity of the person who folds the paper into art. Through their hands, the paper-folder has accomplished their artistry by shaping a flat sheet of paper into a finished model which, in my opinion, then becomes their masterpiece.

Furthermore, such paper masterpieces are a blend of two sets of traditions: Korean and Indonesian. These two societies were seen side-by-side and were shown to be complimentary by the participants at a two-day workshop at Petra Christian University in Surabaya, coached by Korean artists. It seems that the mission of spreading traditional Korean forms of art has been accomplished.

First, during the workshop most participants weaved the two cultures together in their masterpieces. Korean elements, such as Hanbok attire, traditional fans and the Taegeukgi national flag, are present alongside Indonesian elements, such as Balinese traditional clothes and the two-colored Indonesian national flag. It was really wonderful to see the way in which this "art diplomacy" was working. The Indonesian participants learnt the traditional Korean art of folding paper and visualized it through their masterpieces, while the artists were happy to see their students produce a work of art that symbolized the relationship between our two nations in these creations.

In addition, the traditional Korean art of folding paper has promoted peace among nations. The word "peace," as used in the paper-folding, signifies that every country has a right to state security and to an absence of conflict, with no nuclear bombs threatening day-to-day life. Every nation should coexist in perfect harmony and freedom. To avoid war, there is the possibility of bridging differences among nations by bringing out peace through cultural steps. The workshop organized by the Korean Paper Culture Foundation allowed people to share their values and their day-to-day lives. In other words, they

became one, incorporating two or more different ways of life. That was what I meant by the word "peace." There were no more boundaries, no more differences.

To infuse the spirit of maintaining peace and harmony, one needs a lot of effort. The fact that in Korea they teach *jongi jeobgi* to school children as an art lesson together with another subject, like math, science or history, inspires other nations to develop their own *jongi jeobgi* to teach to their young from an early age. Besides allowing children's creativity to flow as they create paper art, the young people will learn how to work together with partners and other people. During this learning process, they are taught how to be patient, tolerant, tough and even how to endure hardships when they try to call for peace around the world.

This cultural approach to diplomacy is very important. In my opinion, anybody can be a diplomat. Why not? This has been proven by the gracious paper-folding artists who have been true diplomats from Korea to other countries around the world. Their volunteer efforts to bridge the social gaps and to be ambassadors for Korea shows their devotion not only to Korea but also a commitment to other people from across nations to maintain peace.

In the song "We Are the World," Michael Jackson sings, "There comes a time when we heed a certain call, when the world must come together as one... We all are a part of God's great big family." Whatever our nationality, in order to be one big family we should be united into one peaceful community. For certain, the traditional Korean art of folding paper -- or "K-paper" -- has helped to make this happen.