

## SUMMARY OF SEOUL, KOREA GEORGIST VISIT AND PRESENTATION

(Feb. 27 to March 1, 2013)

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I traveled to Asia in February, 2013. I had had casual email exchanges with a Korean Georgist and knew that there had been a strong Georgist presence there for many years. This was due mainly to the Christian missionary work of Rev. Archer Torrey, who, with his wife Ruth ran a church program named Jesus Abbey for decades. After being given the authorization to make overtures to the Koreans, I contacted them and a visit was arranged as part of my return from Thailand.

Since the strong contingent of Georgists in Korea was already knowledgeable about the philosophy of land value taxation, I was asked to direct my talk to the activity and successes of Georgists in other countries of the world. This is what they most

wanted to learn about. As a member of the International Union Executive Committee, as one that has attended the three most recent past conferences (the last being in Buenos Aires), as well as having served on the boards of other Georgist institutions in North America, I was well positioned to talk about what is going on. In the course of two hours, with the assistance of a proficient translator, I was able to provide a run-down on what prospects hold in various nations at the present time. I also explained what I saw to be the recent resurgent interest in Georgist philosophy and validity: 1) increasing data availability, 2) computer power -- statistical tools, and 3) computer mapping -- GIS presentations. I acknowledged also that the internet has brought Georgists together for exchanges and cooperation, and that websites and the accessibility and translation of materials has also played an important role. The main focus of my talk, however, was an account of the roughly twenty nations that have an active and growing interest.

Korea today has about one hundred people who profess to be Georgists, in many instances due to their affiliation with the Christian community, about 25 percent of the population. Several of them are professional academics and have graduate degrees from American universities. With the passing of Rev. Torrey and his wife, the acknowledged leader of the network is Professor Yoon-Sang Kim, from Kyungpook University in the south-central part of the peninsula. Dr. Kim is a professor of public administration, but several others are planners, economists, and assessors. About twenty-five assembled in Seoul at the Georgist meeting room on the last day of February. I was surprised to learn that so many were fluent in English, and one was a visiting clergyman from Philippines. Although my formal powerpoint presentation was only two hours, I was able, in the course of over two days to get to know them more easily.

My primary host, Dr. Sung-Chan Cho, had his graduate training on land policy in mainland China, and is quite proficient in English as well. He carries the title of Research Director for Land and Housing Policy, of the Institute of Land and Liberty, Henry George Center in Seoul. Cho was a most gracious host, and arranged the schedule and my accommodations for the complete duration of my stay. We had occasion to talk at length, and he will be my direct contact for whatever might now eventuate. He assured me that there was strong interest in hosting an International

Union Georgist conference and that all of the central figures would be discussing this possibility. I explained that typically each of the attendees pays his or her own way, including, perhaps, a registration fee. I also promised to separately send particular materials and information that some were interested in knowing. The idea of a Basic Income Guarantee was of interest to one person; the extent of favor of Prof. Joe Stiglitz by another. As it happened, the Philippine clergyman had been a student of author Charles Avila, whose book, *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching*, is commended particularly by Alanna Hartzok. I have since learned that Rev. Avila is still very much alive and active in Philippine society.

In sum this was a delightful and warm experience, and all the Korean Georgists were most interested and hospitable. Dr. Kim noted to me at one point that I am only the second Georgist visitor to have come to see them for many years -- Nic Tideman being the first. I learned lots more about the strength of their movement, even though the current government shows no appreciation of our point of view whatsoever. What I also learned from Professor Kim is that Korea assesses its property parcels every year, every plot, by land price base, (concluded on page 15)

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so that it is not difficult to calculate the land rent by individual parcel or in the aggregate. I was surprised to learn that the government has not created land value maps, something that would also be helpful both to them and to the wider Georgist cause. These are things that I encouraged them to do.

In the final analysis, much is to be gained by a closer relationship with the Korean Georgists, and I am pleased to say that my visit was very successful.

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