

The Situation in Japan: Weakened hospitality

Jun Nakai, SJ

Several years ago, I guided a Korean youth to a Korean school in Shimonoseki. Korean schools were established by Korean Residents who or whose parents were brought to Japan during the colonial period for passing Korean language and culture to the next generation of Koreans residents. After the war and ever since the establishment of Korean schools, the Japanese government has been discriminating against these Korean schools and trying to shut them down. The principal of Korean School in Shimonoseki explained the history of the Korean school to a young man, remarking, “But discrimination has gradually been eased, hasn't it?”, by replying, “We believe discrimination has actually worsened. The children at the Korean school also feel uneasy about the current situation in Japan.” Several years have passed since then, and Japanese nationalism has only escalated. A new political party advocating “Japan First” is gaining popularity, and the ultra-rightist Takaichi administration boasts unprecedented approval ratings. The Zero Plan policy has been implemented, forcing more foreign residents to leave Japan. Many foreigners now live in fear, wondering if they will be deported next.

In November 2025, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan and Korea was held in Hiroshima, and I was involved in coordinating it. I asked a Korean teacher living in Hiroshima to explain the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. The teacher spoke on the theme of the museum as seen through the eyes of Koreans. The Peace Memorial Museum was renovated in 2019, but the exhibits now seem to reinforce the image of Hiroshima, a peaceful city, suddenly being struck by the atomic bomb. Exhibits addressing Hiroshima's aggressive past as a military city have been weakened. The professor clearly explained that the exhibits fail to confront Japan's responsibility for the war, clearly showing that Japan has shifted its focus away from peace. I find meaning in the fact that the Japanese and Korean bishops were able to share their thoughts on peace from this perspective.

The light shines in the darkness. The river of Integral Ecology and Synodality

In the darkness of the times, the light shines even more visibly, as Leo XIV said in his message of peace. Precisely in this era, I see solidarity—the desire to join hands across national borders—in the common mind between the Catholic Churches of Japan and Korea and between their Bishops' Conferences, expressed for example in their support of the anti-nuclear movement. Japan and the Korean Catholic Church has been strengthening their work together for abolishing a nuclear power plant through the “Korea Japan anti-nuclear power plant Pilgrimage” for ten years. One of the main

reasons why Japan government clings to the policy of promoting the nuclear power plant is to retain the technology of creating nuclear weapons. Such solidarity is the light I see in this time of darkness.

Last month, at a gathering for Myanmar held at a Protestant church in Japan, a Myanmar pastor said, “The time when Jesus was born was truly a time of darkness. Yet even in that darkness, the light was already shining.” These words from someone from Myanmar, one of the most wounded places in Asia today, struck me deeply. In this dark age, the Pope calls us to seek out the light. And indeed, I can see the light that illuminates our deepest longing.

I serve as the coordinator for the Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Network in the Asia-Pacific region. In that role, I am part of the core team for the Social Apostolate in the Asia-Pacific region. In October, we held a meeting at a Jesuit facility in an indigenous village in Mindanao, where we envisioned where we are heading as one Body of Christ, as one community. I designed that vision in a single image. There is a river flowing from Pope Francis. I feel it has two complementary elements—integral ecology and synodality—becoming a river that flows through this world. We are rooted in the earth nourished by this river, integrated as one forest, moving together toward the horizon of healing and reconciliation for this world.

I am involved in various other activities: refugee migration issues, ecological issues. while engaging in directing social apostolate center in Shimonoseki. There are many things to do, but above all, I believe that if we let this river inspire the activities and the people we meet, we can change the world.

Going forward actively with Laudato Si' for a world without nuclear weapons and plants

To give a specific example, I collaborate with the Laudato Si' Desk of the Hiroshima Diocese to organize Laudato Si' camps and retreats. What proves helpful during these events is a book I translated from French: *Spiritual Journey for Ecological Conversion*, which guides participants through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius using Laudato Si'. This journey of seeking what I must do to heal the world is indeed calling me to take another step forward. Within this flow, God provides what is needed. A person embodying such hope has appeared in the Hiroshima Diocese, and Pax Christi Hiroshima is also beginning to take shape. I hold the hope that it may become a community transforming people towards a world without nuclear weapons. Fortunately we have a good bishop, Bishop Shirahama, who is passionately engaging in partnership with the Catholic Church of the United States for the world without nuclear weapons.

The Global network of mutual trust will save lives

In his letter, Pope Leo XIV refers to Francis of Assisi. His example becomes a signpost on our journey toward a world without nuclear weapons. In last June, I had the opportunity to visit Assisi and La Verna in Italy. What inspired me there was the Trinitarian spirituality of Francis of Assisi. It is about living the interconnectedness of all things. Solidarity with people worldwide and with all creation, united in the mystery of the Trinity. I feel placed within that solidarity. I have experienced that lives can be saved when we actually build and expand networks based on trust. That is precisely why I believe we must continue to expand our international cooperative network through these connections in this time of darkness.

Fr Jun Nakai, a Jesuit priest, directs the social apostolate center in Shimonoseki, in the western city of Japan. He has been working for the reconciliation of Northeast Asia, as a bridge between Korea and Japan. He is also working and networking to help the poor people. Currently, he is also committed to the work of coordinating the Migrants and Refugees Network of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific(JCAP) .