

From Segregation to Social Inclusion - Bridging the Difficult Past

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Abstract

This paper analyzes metaphorical meanings of the Sorokdo Grand Bridge to create community coherence and symbolize social inclusion of leprosy-affected people in the nation when it opened on September 25, 2007. The bridge physically connects the Nokdong Port on the southwest of Korea Peninsular and the Sorok Island, where the former Sorokdo Leprosarium was located. Since Sorokdo Leprosarium was built to quarantine leprosy-affected people under the Japanese colonial force in 1916, the island has been seen as a fearful place. Staff and leprosy-affected people used to take the ferry at the Nokdong Port and arrive at separate ports on the island. Due to social stigma, leprosy-affected residents have been marginalized and almost forgotten by the nation for almost a century.

The firework event that blossomed over the sea water in 2000 served as an invisible bridge to unify people on both sides of the peninsular and isolated island, and eventually led to the construction of the 1,160m Sorokdo Bridge. In addition to signifying the end of segregation of leprosy-affected residents, the construction of the bridge inevitably hints at the future development of Sorok Island. Undoubtedly, its construction was the most anticipated and significant event in 2007, and more tourists now travel to the island due to the easy accessibility from the mainland.

According to the World Bank (2013), the central aim of social inclusion is to strengthen the participation of excluded individuals and groups in social process by improving their ability and dignity as well as opportunities available for them to participate. How the construction of Sorokdo Bridge successfully responded to social justice of the painful heritage, but failed to promise the social inclusion would be the center of discussion in this paper.