



**Speech given by the President
of the Max Planck Society**

Professor Peter Gruss

Conference "Perspectives in Biosciences and Material Sciences"

Seoul National University

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President Lee,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to our joint conference today! Thank you very much, President Lee, for hosting us at Seoul National University. I would like to extend my thanks to Vice President Kim (Shin Boh), as well as the two involved deans. My thanks also go to our colleagues from the Max Planck Institutes: above all to Professor Wegner and Professor Dieter Gallwitz! Without the support and organizational talent of all these people, this conference would not have been possible!

In one of his novels, the famous German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described science as "*a great symphony in which the nations' voices gradually emerge*". I think this is a very fitting image; one which is even more true today, in a world of ever closer international networking. In any case, in today's symphony of science, the voice of Korea is becoming more and more resonant and powerful.

The upturn that has taken place in Korea in recent years is very impressive. This is at least as much the case for economy as it is for science. The past few years have seen the setting up of a number of new universities and research institutes as well as the expansion of existing ones. Many of these have developed into centres of excellence. Several Korean science institutions have made a name for themselves. The number of

publications by Korean researchers in internationally recognised journals is growing continuously and receiving ever-greater acclaim. Congratulations on all your success!

Europe and, above all, Germany are following these developments with great interest. Korea has made major investments into research at all levels – on the part of the state as much as that of industry. I am convinced that this has been - and will be - an investment into the future! To return to Goethe's quotation: Korea's voice is being heard more clearly in the scientific symphony of nations. The metaphor also illustrates that science is never simply the concern of one single nation. It can only be successfully performed in a joint effort across all borders. Of course, competition between researchers is an integral element. But I think it is far more important that scientists from different nations complement each other in their work and in doing so, profit from each other.

In science, we are faced with such a host of unanswered questions that there can never be too much research. And these questions are not only of academic interest. The challenges facing humankind in the 21st century can only be solved with the help of new insights from basic research.

I think you all know these challenges. Think of climate change, the consequences of which are affecting all of us! Think of epidemics that have the potential to spread on a global scale! Think of the question of how we can feed the growing number of people on this planet and provide them with sustainable energy! These are challenges that unite us across all borders, cultures, and continents. If we want to tackle the problems together, science must cooperate internationally. I think Germany and Korea, in particular, have many essential things in common despite their geographical distance.

Korea and Germany have no actual raw materials and therefore have to rely on digging up the "gold between the ears". Both countries are highly industrialised and therefore have to guarantee long-term energy provision. Both countries are undergoing demographic change, which will lead to a large part of their population being 60 years of age and older in the not too distant future.

No doubt there are further parallels between our countries. But I think that these three examples are sufficient to highlight the benefits of a close scientific collaboration, also in terms of some research subjects. I am therefore very pleased that in recent years Korea and Germany have already established contacts and developed joint activities. For

example Koreans constitute the largest group of Asians studying in Germany. The German research funding organisation *DFG* has a partnership with the *Korea Science and Engineering Foundation*. The application-oriented *Fraunhofer Gesellschaft* collaborates, among others, with the *Korea Institute of Science and Technology*. In addition, several German universities are involved in the ambitious project of the *Korean German Institute of Technology*.

Furthermore, there are already well-established ties between scientists from Korean research institutions and Max Planck Institutes: Currently there are 55 doctoral students, postdocs and visiting scientists working at our institutes. Last year, there were 17 collaborative projects between Korean universities and Korean institutes, and Max Planck Institutes.

In the Max Planck Society, international ties are principally established by our scientists in a bottom-up approach. This has proven to be very successful. Collaboration should not merely be a matter of mutual declarations of intent; it has to be actually "lived"! With the conference "Perspectives in Biosciences and Material Sciences", we are taking the next step in this process.

Both conference topics are interesting and relevant to each of our countries for different reasons. Both Korean science and the Max Planck Society have a global profile in both fields. In both fields, there is already some degree of productive cooperation. And both fields are absolutely relevant when it comes to tackling the challenges faced by Korea and Germany, which I already mentioned. For example, we expect important insights from the life-sciences field of brain research into the causes of age-related dementia. Such fresh research will open up new possibilities for fighting this disease. Research in materials science, on the other hand, can e.g. make a contribution to increasing the level of effectiveness of solar cells. This, in turn, can help to generate more environmentally friendly energy.

I am very pleased that today's event has attracted such great interest in Korea and that such a large number of highly respected Korean scientists is able to participate. From Germany, 19 of our department directors have travelled to Korea for this occasion. This just demonstrates how important the exchange with Korea is for us.

It is the goal of this conference to act as a crystallization core to increase cooperation between our institutions. I hope that it will especially stimulate the interest of young Korean scientists in spending a research period at one of our institutes.

Coming back to Goethe: "Let the voices of science be heard as a great symphony!"