

Chapter Six

Man-Made Accidents

April 16, 2014 – Sewol Ferry Disaster

On April 16, 2014, I came home to find out that a boat accident had claimed the lives of over 300 people. Most of these people were high school students who were on a field trip to Jeju Island. My first thought was, “My students and I could have been among the victims!” I also thought about how devastating the accident would be for a school, the victims’ families, and the whole country. Some people were shocked; others appeared traumatized. I knew at that very moment that I would write a book about Korea. Such was my initial reaction to the *Sewol* ferry accident, one of Korea’s worst tragedies in the recent past. As of this writing, a total of 304 people lost their lives. Nine bodies have not been found.

Efficiency

Today, our world is undergoing profound changes. Many of these changes have come about from advancements in technology. Volumes have been written about the impact that technology has had in our lives; therefore, I will not go into detail here. Suffice it to say that the profound impact the Digital Revolution has had on humankind is akin to that of the Industrial Revolution. The fundamental difference is that the influence of the former is more profound and ubiquitous. It is influencing humanity at a more personal level; it is changing not only how we work, but how we live and how we think. Technology has both forced us and enabled us to assess how we perform tasks daily in industries from business to health care, banking, tourism and hospitality, entertainment, and even education.

As we incorporate technology into our daily lives, we become so comfortable with it, and accustomed to it, that we take it for granted. When ATMs were first introduced, some of us distrusted their technology. Concerns about the machine’s ability to conduct a secure, private transaction delayed our acceptance of the new machines. Now, for better or worse, we have embraced even the smartphone, which we use for almost every aspect of our lives. Despite our very same privacy concerns, we turn to our smartphones for everything from selecting our commute to monitoring our bank accounts, our pulse, our physical activity and the quality of our sleep, planning our day’s activities based on weather forecasts, conducting financial transactions, and deciding where we vacation, where we shop, and where we eat. Technology has made almost everything that touches our lives more convenient and accessible, thus making us more efficient.

Korean culture, of all cultures, recognizes the value of efficiency. I would dare to say that efficiency is a way of life for Koreans as evidenced by the pervasive “*pali pali*” culture. For Koreans, efficiency is everywhere, from how students arrive at the answer to a math problem to the use of student rankings to determine candidates for top-tier universities and for hiring purposes at major corporations, from driving habits to the saturation of love motels, and from at-home cooking to restaurant dining.