



## **Comments on "Don't politicize the Massacre" by Katherine H.S. Moon**

*From Dennis Halpin, House Committee on International Relations*

I believe this article is feeding on a near-hysteria in the Asian community, and the Korean-American community in particular, that anti-immigrant, racist Americans will use the tragic incident at Virginia Tech to conduct an anti-Asian pogrom. Rumors swept the Korean-American community in Virginia, for example, after the Virginia Tech tragedy falsely reporting that Korean-Americans were being attacked in Richmond. Yet I am not aware of any violent, ethnic retaliation for this event so far.

As Dr. Moon's article points out, there are always a few irrational bloggers who will make outrageous statements. The incident with radio broadcaster Imus a few weeks ago demonstrates the potential for racist remarks in public in the United States. It is true that there were incidents of Muslim-Americans being attacked after September 11th. Nothing can excuse violence against such innocent persons. However, September 11th was an act of political terrorism designed specifically to kill Americans rather than another example of what a mentally disturbed person in possession of a firearm can do.

The true danger here is that continued expressed fears of retaliation - like Korean mothers in Seoul calling their children in the United States and telling them not to attend classes - will become a self-fulfilling prophecy and that racist individuals will respond. It should be noted that the focus of the U.S. media and the American public has NOT been on Mr. Cho's ethnicity - it has been on issues of campus security, gun violence, the response of officials to warning signs of mental illness in an individual, and the response time of police and campus officials. These are the areas where the debate about the lessons of the Virginia Tech tragedy is likely to remain.

When two school girls were tragically killed by a USFK military vehicle in South Korea a few years ago, angry crowds appeared outside the U.S. Embassy and in front of U.S. military facilities shouting "Yankee, Go Home!" and burning American flags. Signs were posted in Seoul restaurants that "No Americans Will Be Served." Nothing like that has happened in the U.S. There are no angry crowds in front of the South Korean Embassy. It is time to stop all of the hysterical rhetoric about a racist reaction to the Virginia Tech massacre; a reaction which has not taken place. Americans recognize that Mr. Cho could have been a deranged American citizen like the teenagers who led the slaughter at Columbine High School. The fact that he was a Korean citizen is seen as no more than a tragic accident.

*From Ralph Cossa, Pacific Forum CSIS*

I have been surprised and disappointed by the degree of attention paid in the Asian (not just Korean) press about the ethnic identity of the Virginia Tech gunman. I have been pleased and proud that this has not become an issue in the U.S. mainstream media or among the general American public, as best as I can tell. In this regard, I call our readers' attention to the following editorial in the Korea Herald.

### **Collective Guilt**

*Korea Herald Editorial, April 21, 2007*

Koreans, who have been in close and wide-ranging contact with Americans since U.S. participation in the 1950-53 Korean War, have come to believe that they are well aware of what America and its people are really like. But the Virginia Tech tragedy raises serious doubt about this widely held conviction. Many Koreans were dumbfounded and felt ashamed when they learned a Korean student shot dead more than 30 people at the university. This first reaction was followed by concerns about a potential backlash against the Korean community in the United States, and against Korea as a nation.

Apparently, behind these reactions is a sense of collective guilt the Korean people feel about the heinous crime committed by a fellow Korean. Koreans, having traditionally been trained to think of themselves as members of a family, a group and a nation, rather than as individuals, have shouldered collective responsibility for the slayings and feared Koreans residing in the United States would soon be targets of reprisal attacks in an ethnic conflict. But almost all of the scores of emails that we at The Korea Herald received from the United States reassured us that there will be no racial, political or other forms of retribution against Korea and Koreans. The writers made efforts to convince us that ethnicity had no place in the crime, and that it was committed by a deranged individual who happened to be Korean. Among the emails is one from Kathy L. Cronin, who wrote: "Please convey to the people of Korea that America is a vast and diverse nation of vast and diverse backgrounds, opinions, abilities, and mental aptitude. There may be individuals who voice an opinion which 99.999 percent of the people in America would vehemently disavow."

Some of the emails also gave us valuable advice. They urged us to reflect on the emotionally-charged responses we had against the United States when a U.S. armored vehicle accidentally killed two Korean schoolgirls in 2002. We have much to learn from the Virginia Tech tragedy.