

What It Means to Represent

"There may be declining companies, but there is no such thing as a declining industry."

This is a phrase that Ki Hak Sung, Chairman of Youngone Group, has emphasized for many years. Companies in the textile industry may lose their competitiveness and disappear, but as long as people wear clothes, the textile and fashion industry itself will never cease to exist. To me, this simple statement reflects an important way of understanding an industry.

An industry is not built by companies alone. It also needs organizations that connect businesses and people while representing their shared interests. That is why industry associations exist. They bring together issues that individual companies cannot solve on their own, communicate the voices of the industry to government and society, reconcile differing interests, and help chart the path forward.

Since becoming Chairman of the Korea Fashion Association, I have often reflected on the meaning and responsibility of both the Association and its chairmanship. The position carries authority, but that authority does not come from the title itself. It exists only when member companies entrust their representation to the Chair and have confidence in the decisions made on their behalf. That is why an association must be transparent, and its decision-making process must be fair enough to be explained openly to anyone.

This principle is especially important when selecting those who will represent the industry. It is not only the method of selection that matters, but also whether those participating in the process genuinely reflect the diverse voices of the industry. If the process is dominated by a particular perspective or interest group, it is difficult to claim true representativeness, no matter how formal the procedure may appear. The voices of different sectors and generations must be balanced. Procedural fairness begins not with the outcome, but with the way the process itself is designed.

The same applies to leadership succession. Long experience is an invaluable asset to any industry, but there must also be room for new generations and fresh perspectives to emerge. Familiar faces may seem like the safest choice, but familiarity alone does not guarantee progress. If we speak about the future of the industry while leadership remains rooted in the past, it is worth asking whether we are truly preparing for the future.

Artificial intelligence (AI), digital transformation, sustainability regulations, and the restructuring of global supply chains are reshaping corporate survival strategies. In such

an era, the role of an industry association extends beyond administration. It must discover new voices, connect generations, and create opportunities for the next generation of leaders to grow.

The longer an organization exists, the more naturally it tends to rely on familiar choices. It is understandable to place trust in proven experience. Yet when the same choices are repeated without question, the range of possibilities becomes narrower. Healthy organizations do not settle for familiar answers; they continue exploring new possibilities and expanding their options.

The Chair of an association is not the owner of the industry, but someone entrusted by member companies with the responsibility of representing them for a limited period of time. I try never to lose sight of that fact. An association exists not for any individual or particular group, but for the shared interests and collective development of the industry. That is why a Chair must possess not only competence, but also fairness, integrity, and the discipline to place the common good above personal interests. To value responsibility before authority—that, I believe, is the mindset required of anyone who serves as the head of an industry association.

The textile and fashion industry is not a declining industry. For that very reason, the people and organizations that lead it must continue responding to the changing times. Respecting experience while opening the door for new ideas and new generations to participate naturally—within that healthy cycle lies the beginning of the industry's next chapter.