Why Some Journeys Are Worth the Distance

The word **"*MooYeok* (means trade)"** is embedded in our company's name. Compared with today's corporate names, which often favor sleek English initials or stylish brand identities, it may sound somewhat old-fashioned. Yet these two syllables capture our identity and the very essence of what we do more clearly than anything else.

The meaning of our name is closely tied to the origins of our group. In the 1970s, when Korea was aspiring to become an export powerhouse, our founder, Chairman Kihak Sung, worked in the New Market Development Team at Seoul Trading. Rather than following well-established paths, he chose to explore new markets by exporting sweaters to Europe. That pioneering spirit laid the foundation for what has become the Youngone Group today. In those days, trade meant more than simply buying and selling goods. It represented the entrepreneurial pursuit of expanding markets by venturing into new territories. With a quality product in hand and the determination to seek out new buyers around the world, opportunities followed.

Today, however, the landscape of global trade has changed dramatically. Global supply chains are being rapidly reshaped, while countries are redefining the international trading system by balancing economic security with national interests. Korea, too, continues to expand its global trade network through Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs), and other forms of economic cooperation. Amid these changes, I have come to appreciate that trade is far more than a commercial transaction. It is a continuous process of cooperating, competing, and building trust with countries that differ in history, culture, legal systems, and institutions. At times, achieving greater outcomes requires compromise at the negotiating table.

Technological advances are also transforming the business environment. Artificial intelligence has evolved beyond a simple tool into autonomous agents capable of making decisions, and corporate management increasingly relies on AI-driven analysis. Yet one area remains fundamentally human: the relationships and negotiations that define business partnerships.

This is precisely where the true value of partnership becomes most evident. A transaction may be about achieving a single result, but a partnership is always built with the future in mind. Our group has been able to grow alongside many of the same global buyers for decades not simply because we celebrated success together, but because we weathered difficult times together as well. Even when geopolitical uncertainty disrupts markets and supply chains come under pressure, the trust built over many years proves stronger than any contract.

That is also why my colleagues and I willingly take two or even three connecting flights simply to attend a meeting that may last only a few hours. Sitting across the table from one another, sharing conversations face-to-face, deepening mutual understanding, and building trust create relationships that make future negotiations and business collaboration far more productive. No matter how advanced technology becomes, relationships between people remain the greatest asset in international trade.

This brings to mind Graham Allison's book *Destined for War*. While the book examines strategic competition and conflict in a rapidly changing international order, its broader message is that what ultimately matters is not conflict itself, but how relationships are managed. Just as trust is the greatest asset in business, stable relations between nations also depend on diplomacy, mutual confidence, and sustained engagement.

This truth becomes even more evident when operating overseas. The longer a company does business in unfamiliar markets, the more it appreciates the importance of government support and diplomatic networks. Thanks to these foundations, Korean companies have been able to establish lasting operations around the world, and Korea has grown into one of the world's leading trading nations. Today, the expertise and networks accumulated by Korea's 173 diplomatic missions overseas continue to provide invaluable support for companies expanding abroad.

Through this column, I hope to share my thoughts on people, industry, business, and society as seen from the field. Carrying forward Korea's proud trading tradition into the next generation—beyond the trade of the past—is a mission I believe we must continue to uphold with both pride and responsibility.