

FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: History Repeatedly Vindicates the Dreamers

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History vindicating dreamers. Illustration: ChatGPT



Dreamers, skeptics, and the future: Defending hope against cynicism in a society where idealism becomes suspect

On 19th May 2026, the South Korean newspaper [Segye Ilbo](#) published an [opinion column](#) by journalist Jeong Seong-su (정성수) reflecting on the meaning of peace activism, Korean reunification, and the tendency of modern societies to dismiss idealistic visions as unrealistic or even irrational. Although the [article](#) emerged from a specifically Korean social and political controversy involving the investigation of a religious organization, its broader themes are universal: How should societies treat people who continue to advocate for peace during periods of conflict and cynicism? At what point does skepticism become contempt for moral idealism itself? And how often has history eventually vindicated people once ridiculed as dreamers?

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To understand the [article](#), it is important to recognize the historical memory that shapes much of modern Korean political thought. Korea spent decades under Japanese colonial rule from

1910 to 1945. During that time, many Koreans lost hope that independence would ever return. Japan appeared militarily and politically invincible, and major world powers showed little interest in Korea's fate. Some Koreans accommodated themselves to colonial rule, while others continued to fight for independence despite overwhelming odds. Looking back today, modern South Korea celebrates the independence activists who refused to surrender hope, even when their cause seemed impossible.

The columnist uses this historical example to make a broader moral argument. During the colonial period, people who insisted that Korea would someday regain independence could easily have been dismissed as unrealistic idealists detached from political reality. Yet history ultimately remembered them not as naïve dreamers, but as individuals whose convictions helped shape the future nation.

The [article](#) specifically invokes Kim Gu (김구 - 1876-1949), one of Korea's most revered independence leaders, who maintained the cause of Korean sovereignty while operating in exile through the Korean Provisional Government (임시정부) in Shanghai (1919-1932). At the time, his efforts may have seemed futile to many observers. In retrospect, however, his persistence became a symbol of patriotic courage and moral conviction.



Kim Gu (1876-1949) in 1930

From this historical foundation, Jeong's [article](#) moves into a contemporary issue. According to the columnist, a religious believer involved as a witness in an investigation connected to a religious organization (종교단체) claimed that investigators had treated discussions of Korean reunification and world peace as essentially "delusional". The [opinion piece](#) does not argue against the legitimacy of criminal investigations themselves. In fact, it explicitly acknowledges that state institutions in a democratic society have both the right and the responsibility to investigate acts alleged to be unlawful. The concern raised by the columnist is different: whether authorities or society at large cross an important line when they begin mocking not merely unlawful behavior, but the ideals and aspirations that individuals hold.

The author argues that peace and reunification may indeed appear unrealistic under current global conditions. Relations between North and South Korea remain tense and frozen. International politics are dominated by war, strategic rivalry, economic inequality, and geopolitical competition among major powers. Against such a backdrop, calls for world peace or Korean reunification can sound abstract, distant, or impractical. Yet the [article](#) asks whether difficult circumstances should lead humanity to abandon such aspirations altogether.

A central idea running throughout the [column](#) is that societies become morally impoverished when they reduce all idealism to fantasy or madness. The author warns that a culture of excessive cynicism risks destroying the very capacity to imagine a better future. Even if peace and reunification seem unattainable today, the [article](#) argues that someone must continue advocating for reconciliation, dialogue, and hope. Otherwise, societies may become trapped in permanent hostility and despair.

The [column](#) also emphasizes that the aspiration for Korean reunification is not merely a religious slogan or the agenda of a single group. In South Korea, reunification has historically been understood as a constitutional and national objective. The South Korean constitution itself contains language affirming peaceful reunification as part of the nation's mission. Therefore, the [Segye Ilbo article](#) argues, dismissing reunification as "delusion" is not simply criticism of one religious movement; it potentially reflects a broader erosion of confidence in shared national ideals.



Mencius (Mengzi - 372-289 f.Kr), Chinese Confucian philosopher, often referred to as the Second Sage as he is traditionally revered as second in importance only to Confucius (551-479 f.Kr) himself within the Confucian philosophical tradition

To strengthen this argument, the columnist places the issue within a larger global historical framework. Many moral and political causes that are widely accepted today were once considered unrealistic or impossible. The abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and the dismantling of racial segregation all began as ideas that powerful institutions and mainstream opinion frequently rejected. Social progress often depended upon minorities who persisted despite ridicule and opposition. According to the [article](#), human civilization advances precisely because some individuals continue pursuing ideals that initially appear unattainable.

The [piece](#) also invokes the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius (맹자), quoting the phrase: "Those who oppose Heaven perish; those who follow Heaven prosper" (逆天者亡 順天者興). In this context, "Heaven" (하늘) is interpreted not narrowly in a religious sense, but more broadly as moral conscience, ethical principles, and humanity's enduring aspiration toward justice and communal well-being. The [article](#) suggests that the pursuit of peace and reconciliation belongs to this larger moral tradition. But more than that, reporter Jeong portrays the longing of his people for peace and reunification of the peninsula "as part of the inevitable moral current of our age".

At its core, the [column](#) is not primarily about one religious organization or one legal case. Rather, it is a reflection on the relationship between realism and idealism in public life. The author accepts that democratic states must uphold law and investigate wrongdoing. However, he cautions against allowing legal or political conflicts to evolve into contempt for moral aspiration itself. Democracies, he argues, should judge unlawful actions through legal processes, but they should remain careful not to ridicule people merely for holding ambitious or hopeful visions about humanity's future.

For non-Korean readers, the [article](#) offers insight into several important aspects of contemporary Korean thought. It reflects the continuing emotional significance of the independence movement (1919-1945) in Korean historical consciousness, the enduring symbolic importance of reunification on the Korean peninsula, and the tension between pragmatism and idealism in a rapidly changing society. More broadly, it speaks to a universal human question: whether societies retain the courage to pursue peace and moral progress even during periods when such goals seem politically unrealistic.

Ultimately, the [article](#) argues that history is often shaped not by those who dismiss hope, but by those who continue defending it despite ridicule.

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Logo of Pyeonghwa Namu (Peace Tree)

On 19th May 2026, two South Korean media outlets – *Pyeonghwa Namu* (Peace Tree) and *ChosunBiz* – reported on escalating political controversy



The Chosun Biz logo

surrounding the “Garden of Gratitude” (감사의 정원) project at Seoul’s *Gwanghwamun Square* and allegations linking the project to **Unificationism** (통일교), the name the Korean media generally use to refer to the religious movement officially called *Family Federation for World Peace and Unification*.

See also *History Often Vindicates the Dreamers*

While both articles focused on accusations raised by *Democratic Party* figures against conservative Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon (오세훈), each outlet emphasized different aspects of the dispute. Observers see the new focus on the issue closely tied to the ongoing campaign for the 3rd June 2026 local elections, especially the highly competitive Seoul mayoral race. The controversy therefore functions as an electoral strategy aimed at weakening Mayor Oh politically before voters go to the polls.

In an article titled “*Controversy Over Alleged Ties Between Unificationism and the Gwanghwamun ‘Garden of Gratitude’ Project*”, reporter Shin Bi-rom (신비롬) of *Pyeonghwa Namu* concentrated on claims of possible collusion between the *Seoul Metropolitan Government* and **Unificationism** through the project’s contractor, *Ilshin Stone* (일신석재).

The article explained that *Democratic Party* lawmaker Seo Yeong-gyo (서영교) and *Seoul City Council* member Lim Gyu-ho (임규호) held a press conference on 17th May in which they questioned why *Ilshin Stone* had been awarded the contract to construct and install 23 stone pillars for the memorial-style project.



Democratic Party lawmaker Seo Yeong-gyo (서영교). Photo: *서울의소리 Voice of Seoul News*. License: *CC Attr 3.0 Unp. Cropped*

According to *Pyeonghwa Namu*, the opposition politicians argued that *Ilshin Stone*’s largest shareholder is affiliated with **Unificationism**, and that the company won the bid despite reportedly submitting a proposal approximately 1 billion won (ca. 660,000 in US dollars) more expensive than a competing bidder. Lim Gyu-ho further criticized the use of an emergency bidding process, arguing that such procedures are normally reserved for urgent matters such as disaster prevention or recovery, whereas the *Garden of Gratitude* project allegedly lacked urgency and had not completed all administrative procedures. Seo Yeong-gyo additionally emphasized that *Ilshin Stone* was founded by **Sun Myung Moon** (문선명), the late co-founder of the **Family Federation**, and questioned why a significantly more expensive bid was selected.

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Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon (오세훈), here in September 2023. Photo: Taipei City Government (臺北市政府). Attribution only license

The *Pyeonghwa Namu* article also revisited earlier controversy involving Oh Se-hoon and **Unificationism**, noting that the mayor had previously drawn criticism in 2021 for sending congratulatory remarks to an event hosted by the religious organization. The report framed the current allegations within a broader narrative of possible political and institutional proximity between Oh and Unificationism-affiliated interests.

In South Korea's media landscape, *Pyeonghwa*

Namu (Peace Tree) is generally viewed as progressive / reformist, critical of conservative evangelical political activism, advocating separation between church power and politics. The outlet frequently covers influence of religious groups on elections and controversies involving groups labeled "cults".

ChosunBiz, in contrast, approached the issue of the *Garden of Gratitude* primarily as an ongoing political dispute during Seoul's mayoral campaign. In the article by reporter Hwang Chae-yeong (황채영), "**Democratic Party: 'The stone pillars in the Garden of Gratitude were made by a company tied to Unificationism' [...] Oh Se-hoon: 'They have extensive construction experience'**", the focus was placed on statements made during a *Democratic Party* (DPK) election committee meeting for Seoul mayoral candidate Jeong Weon-oh (정원오).

Like *Pyeonghwa Namu*, *ChosunBiz* reported Seo Yeong-gyo's allegations that the contractor behind the *Garden of Gratitude* project had links to the **Family Federation** through its founders, **Sun Myung Moon** (문선명) and **Hak Ja Han** (한학자), and through its ownership structure. The article also repeated claims that two companies competed for the contract, but that the more expensive 3.9 billion won (ca. 2,6 million US dollars) proposal submitted by the contractor was selected over a competing 2.9 billion won (ca. 1,9 million US dollars) bid.

However, *ChosunBiz* gave greater attention to conservative Mayor Oh Se-hoon's response. The article reported that the mayor defended the selection of the contractor by arguing that the company possessed the strongest construction track record and most extensive experience in the relevant field in South Korea. Whereas *Pyeonghwa Namu* emphasized suspicions of improprieties and irregular bidding procedures, *ChosunBiz* presented the issue more as a political exchange between the *Democratic Party* (DPK) and the *People Power Party* (PPP) during an election campaign.

Together, the two reports illustrate how the same controversy was framed differently depending on editorial perspective: *Pyeonghwa Namu* highlighting alleged institutional and religious connections, and *ChosunBiz* focusing more narrowly on campaign rhetoric, procurement questions, and the mayor's defense of the contractor's qualifications.

See also *History Often Vindicates the Dreamers*

Text: Knut Holdhus, editor

Featured image above: AI illustration of 23 stone pillars at *Garden of Gratitude* at Gwanghwamun Square in

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