

Korean Reunification: Promise and Perils

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Rev. Sun Myung Moon (True Father to Unificationists) emphasized the "providential significance" of Korean reunification. To him, unifying the Korean peninsula would be "the final act of bringing the global Cold War to a conclusion" and "the blueprint for the unification of the world."

He also envisioned a unified Korea as a driver of global development. He taught that the peninsula will provide a platform for oceanic and continental civilizations to fuse together and develop into a new civilization, inaugurating the Pacific Rim Era.

This article attempts to connect his vision of Korean reunification with current economic, technological, transportation, cultural, and political realities.



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The Promise

Economy. The most optimistic appraisal of Korea's economic future is a 2009 Global Economics Paper, "A United Korea? Reassessing North Korea Risks," published by global investment firm Goldman Sachs. It contends that "North Korea has strong untapped potential, which could be unleashed once meaningful economic reforms start and investment flows in."

In particular, the study emphasizes "synergies between South Korean capital and technology, and North Korean natural resources and labor." It points out, for example, that North Korea has large deposits of minerals valued at 140 times its GDP while South Korea "has virtually no mineral resources" and "imports 97% of the energy and mineral resources [it] uses." Apart from natural resources, the study references North Korea's "abundant and competitive labor force." It notes,

- More than one-third of North Korea's population (37%) lives in rural areas, as was the case in South Korea in the late 1970s when it began its economic ascent;
- The labor force could increase substantially given the current large military population (nearly 1.3 million);
- Pre-college education is compulsory;
- Experience from the Kaesong Industrial Complex suggests that North Korean workers have a strong work ethic and a good potential for productivity enhancement; and,
- North Korea's demographics are relatively young and the population is growing roughly twice as fast as in South Korea.

Based on these findings, the report projected North Korea's "growth potential ... at around 7%-8% per annum should North Korea pursue economic reforms and economic integration with South Korea."

The paper's most striking conclusion pertained to the "potential size of a united Korea in the long term." The report states,

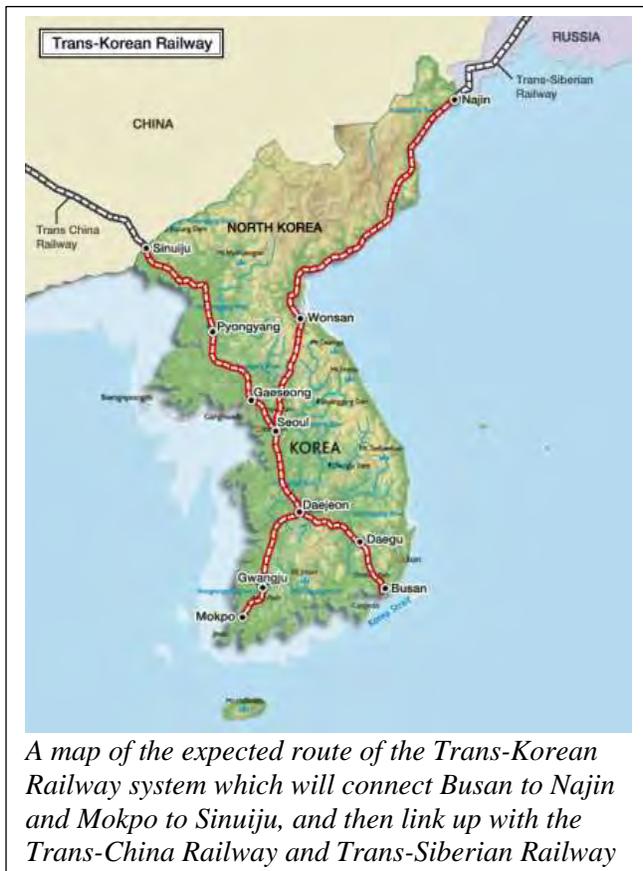
"We project that a united Korea could overtake France, Germany and possibly Japan in 30-40 years in terms of GDP in USD terms, should the growth potential of North Korea be realized. This projection would put the size of a united Korea in 2050 firmly on a par with, or in excess of, that of most G-7 countries, except for the U.S."

The study assumes a peaceful and gradual economic integration between North and South, "similar to the pattern followed in China-Hong Kong (i.e., two economic and political systems coexisting in a country with limited inter-Korean migration).

Technology and Technological Innovation. South Korea is already a world leader in technology and technological innovation. In 2017, it had the fastest average internet connection speed and ranked as one of the world's most wired countries. South Korea has been the top-ranked country in the Bloomberg Innovation Index for the past five years. It also is the top-ranked country in the International Innovation Index. South Korea ranked second in the *U.S. News and World Report* 2018 ranking of "most forward-looking countries."

Transportation Infrastructure. There has been tremendous acceleration of global transportation networks since the end of the Cold War. The most important development is the rebirth of a New Silk

Road consisting of land infrastructure (rail, roads, tunnels, bridges) linking the Far East to Central Asia and even Western Europe. In 2013, China announced its "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) which includes a land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" and an ocean-based "Maritime Silk Road." BRI is one of the largest infrastructure and investment projects in history, covering more than 68 countries, including 65% of the world's population and 40% of the global GDP as of 2017.



A unified Korea is a necessary component of meaningful Eurasian integration. At the Inter-Korean Summit of April 27, 2018, South Korea President Moon Jae-in handed North Korea's Kim Jong-un a thumb drive containing a "New Economic Map of the Korean Peninsula." It was based on a plan to modernize North Korea's antiquated railroads and create an inter-Korean railway system. This will link to Russia's Trans-Siberian Railroad and be an "eastern extension" of China's rail system. It also will motivate Japan to begin work on a Korea-Japan undersea tunnel.

Culture. One of the remarkable developments of the early 21st century was the surge in popularity of Korean culture around the world. Referred to as the "Korean wave" or Hallyu, Korea's cultural influence is the strongest in China, Japan and Southeast Asia but also has spread to India, the Middle East, Central Asia, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Russia, and even the Americas and Europe. It includes massively popular Korean TV dramas (K-Dramas), K-Pop music (the Korean artist Psy's "Gangnam Style" music video was the first YouTube video to

reach one billion views), and a variety of cultural products. According to social scientists, this interest is not trivial but an example of "soft power," i.e., the influence "states can exert simply by being popular and well-liked." In *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation Is Conquering the World through Pop Culture*, Euny Hong argues that Korea has a key advantage in Asia because it has little history of "aggressive colonialism," unlike Japan or China.

Politics. Currently, the great powers are at loggerheads. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an effort to "draw the whole Eurasian continent into its sphere of influence." The United States supported the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) in an effort to contain China. Neither strategy is working. China has faced a good deal of resistance, not only from the United States but also from India. On the other hand, following the United States' withdrawal, TPP is floundering.

The advantage a unified Korea has is a relationship with both global superpowers but identification with neither. A unified Korea will fit the profile of being a "pivot" state, i.e., a nation able "to build profitable relationships with multiple major powers without becoming overly reliant on any one of them." A united Korea will have the opportunity to be "a hub state of Asia, bridging the Eurasian continent and the seas," fostering genuinely multilateral relations and prosperity.

The Perils

The previous section reviewed positive reasons for the Koreas to unite. This section considers the perils of remaining divided.

Population Crisis. The demographic situation in the South is dire. In 2017, South Korea recorded its lowest fertility rate ever with a rate of 1.05 births per woman. In fact, South Korea has been "the lowest fertility level country ... for sixteen years in a row." A 2018 article noted, "In 1980, there were 5.7 million students in elementary schools in South Korea. Today there are three million." In 40 years, according to that report, South Korea will be a country full of old people. Half the population will be over 60, while only a fifth will be under 30. Other developed countries with birth rates insufficient to sustain their populations "look to immigration to supplement the native born who are not being born." However, South Korea is reluctant to admit foreigners. Without meaningful immigration or reunification with the North, some claim "the declining trend cannot be reversed."

Economic Uncertainty. South Korea is the fourth-largest economy in Asia (after China, Japan and India) and eleventh-largest economy in the world. However, South Korea's dependence on exports (46% of GDP) is dangerously higher than the United States (13%), Japan (18%) or China (22%) according to 2015 figures. Heavy dependence on exports renders South Korea susceptible to shifts in global demand and competitors able to offer comparable products at a lower price. A related problem is the lack of diversity of Korean exports with 48% consisting of electronics and 31% transportation goods. At the same time,

South Korea lags behind comparable economies in the domestic and service industry sectors, ranking a dismal 17th out of 18 OECD countries analyzed. Economic integration with North Korea will require time and investment. However, the benefits of an expanded domestic market will outweigh costs. Reunification will be a stimulus rather than a detriment to South Korea's economy.

Isolation from Global Transportation Networks. The two Koreas and Japan are not included in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In addition, South Korea remains "landlocked" by the North. The lack of rail, tunnel and highway access between Japan, Korea and China is the most vital missing link in the world's regional transportation infrastructure. Failure to link-up their transportation networks will perpetuate polarization and risk economic isolation, particularly for the two Koreas. Failure to connect to the New Silk Road land-based infrastructure (rail and pipelines) may result in the Koreas being squeezed out in the competition for Middle East and Central Asian oil and natural gas by India and China. South Korean planners also need to take seriously the Russian Federation's stated intention of constructing tunnels between its mainland and Sakhalin Island and between Sakhalin Island and Hokkaidō, Japan (a considerably shorter distance than the Korea-Japan tunnel). This would allow Russia and Japan to bypass South Korea and threaten its strategic prominence as a gateway to the mainland.



President Moon Jae-in's vision has a northern and southern component. The New Northern Policy expands South Korea's cooperation on infrastructure projects, including ports, railways, natural gas pipelines, electrical grids, and Arctic shipping lanes. Primarily focused on Russia, the New Northern Policy includes North Korea, Belarus, Ukraine, Mongolia, China, and the five Central Asian countries. The New Southern Policy aims to bolster South Korea's economic cooperation, including trade and energy infrastructure, with ASEAN countries (click map to enlarge; graphic courtesy of the CSIS Reconnecting Asia Project).

The Possibility of War. The leaders of both Koreas committed themselves to "Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula" at their Inter-Korean Summit on April 27, 2018. However, past leaders made similar pledges only to see commitments broken and promises unfulfilled. In fact, both sides have been preparing for war since 1953. North Korea has an estimated 8,000 big guns embedded in hardened artillery sites just north of the DMZ, 40 miles from Seoul. It has 700,000 ground forces, 2,000 tanks, 300 aircraft, over 400 surface warships, and about 50 submarines within 100 miles of the DMZ. The South has in place a "Korean Massive Punishment and Retaliation Plan" which includes decapitation of top North Korean leadership. The United States has some 30,000 military personnel stationed in Korea, 40,000 in Japan where the U.S. Seventh Fleet is headquartered, and squadrons of long-range bombers in Guam.

Whatever the provocation, whether due to miscalculation or deliberate intent, no one can rule out the possibility of a second Korean War so long as North and South remain divided. Some estimates project casualties in the greater Seoul metropolitan area "may surpass 100,000 within 48 hours ... even without the use of North Korean weapons of mass destruction." The U.S. Congressional Research Service estimates that North Korea could hit the South Korean capital with an astonishing 10,000 rockets per minute -- and that such a barrage could kill more than 300,000 South Koreans in the opening days of the conflict. Use of chemical or biological agents, of which North Korea is believed to have 2,500-5,000

metric tons, would drive the death and casualty total upwards exponentially as would nuclear weapons. As one analyst put it, "A new war on the Korean Peninsula wouldn't be as bad as you think. It would be much, much worse."

Heavenly Korea

Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon (True Mother) utilizes the term "Heavenly Korea" in referring to Korea's national destiny. She envisions a nation that accepts the Unification Marriage Blessing and family ideal, signified by the nation's president conducting or overseeing a holy blessing ceremony and the multiplication of marriage blessings at the grassroots level conducted by innumerable "tribal messiahs." However, there is a question as to how the Unification Marriage Blessing will transform Korean national identity and public policy. I suggest it will do so by fostering multiculturalism and transnational patriotism.

Multiculturalism. Korea's national consciousness, North and South, has tended to be insular. The North manifests this in its national ideology of *juche*, or self-sufficiency. The South, though far more integrated with the world's economy, nevertheless retains with the North a strong commitment to ethnic and cultural homogeneity based upon the narrative of being a "pure race" of people descended from a single ancestor. This has changed somewhat under the impress of South Korea's population crisis, and the government has supported "marriage migrants," mostly Chinese and Southeast Asian women who marry Korean men. An estimated third of all children born in 2020 are expected to be of part Korean and part other Asian descent. By 2020 and 2030 respectively, an estimated 5% and 10% of the South Korean population will be composed of foreign-born and immigrant families. Some envision South Korea transitioning from a "mono-ethnic to a multi-ethnic nation."

If the Unification Marriage Blessing movement took hold in Korea, this development would accelerate. Rev. Moon made no secret of his preference for "Exchange Marriage," i.e., marriages between persons of different races, cultures and nationalities, and especially those from former enemy nations. He also made it clear that he intended to set up international villages and living arrangements in South Korea. If, as Rev. Moon argued, "all the strands of world history meet on the Korean peninsula," there is no reason why Korea wouldn't be a hospitable place to the world's people. Studies suggest that "sustained bursts of growth and innovation tend to occur in places buffeted by cultural crosscurrents, invigorated by fresh energy, talents and perspectives." If that's true, a unified Korea might inspire a new global renaissance.

Transnational Patriotism. Connected to his vision of intercultural, interracial and international unification, Rev. Moon called upon Korea to embrace "transnational patriotism." As he put it, "Once unified as a nation ... [Korea] will not seek to exploit the world. Rather, it will be a true nation, one that sacrifices for the world." Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon has echoed Rev. Moon's words in continually referencing the needs of the world's 7.5 billion people and of the natural environment. On November 11, 2017, she issued a challenge to her fellow Koreans:

"I will say this to the Korean people: We have received Heaven's blessing. We must live lives in which we can share that blessing. What must we do for the global providence?"

As a divided nation, Korea had limited opportunities to exercise global leadership. Recent Korean leaders have proposed "Global Korea" and "Trustpolitik" initiatives in order to achieve "a stable and prosperous global system." However, these initiatives have not achieved much, if any, traction due to continual breakdowns in the North-South relationship. According to one commentator, "There are already enough visions, master plans, roadmaps, and proposals ... [W]hat is needed is a breakthrough in the stalled inter-Korean relationship."

It is to be hoped that the current efforts of the Republic of Korea, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States will achieve that breakthrough. If so, a unified Korea, hopefully a "heavenly" Korea, will emerge as a major new player on the world stage.

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Photo at top: *South Korean President Moon Jae-in exchanges signed copies of the Panmunjom Declaration with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on April 27, 2018.*