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Cover Page Footnote

Huge thank you to my mentor, Professor Brian Lagotte, truly could not have achieved this without your support. I would also like to thank my friend, Kaitlin Krause, for listening to my rambles and answering any comprehension questions for me. And lastly, thank you to my family for the never ending support and love.

The Inter-Korean Relationship: Views from South Korean University Students

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to understand how South Koreans at the University of Kansas feel about South Korea's increase in influence and its effect on the politics of Korean reunification. Previous research often lacked analysis of the cultural and social consequences of unification, and also lacked much qualitative data of the younger generation. My data includes interview transcriptions of South Korean exchange students studying at the University of Kansas. Within the individual interviews, I sought to understand the perspectives of the younger generation of South Koreans ages 18-30, in regard to the policies of Korean reunification and the political connection to South Korea's global cultural influence. The interviewer asked the students thirty open-ended, discussion questions to gather personal insight into the Korean relationship and discuss the experiences of each interviewee. The long individual interviews sessions uncovered the common trends in rhetoric among the students. The data revealed the younger generations' emotional connection to North Korea, opinions on South Korean President Moon, as well as the thoughts on the policies of Korean reunification. The research will continue to add to the discussions on the socio-economics of the Koreas and the academic dialogue surrounding Korean reunification.

Keywords: South Korea, North Korea, Reunification, Politics

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1950, the communist country of North Korea invaded non-communist South Korea in hopes to gain full control of the peninsula. However, after nearly three years of battling back and forth for control, a ceasefire was declared. Korea was split at the 38th parallel and remained separated for almost seventy years. The relationship between North and South Korea is one of complexity, but the idea of inter-Korean integration has been present since the 2000s. The movement began with President Kim Dae-Jung and the establishment of the Sunshine Policy, aimed to stop nuclear aggression and strengthen the relationship of the two countries (Son, 2006). The policy, which includes a railroad and highway system, was created in hopes to soften the tensions between the two countries and begin steps towards inter-Korean collaborations (Son, 2006). The policy struggled as North Korea continued to pursue nuclear weapon creation thus not complying with the policy regulation; production was halted soon after and was not revisited until very recently.

Current South Korean President Moon Jae-in is very much in favor of supporting inter-Korean collaboration and has actively pursued new ways to incorporate North Korean resources into South Korea. Coincidentally, President Moon was Chief of Staff to the former President Roh (2003-2008), who was also in favor of North Korean engagement (Son, 2006). Since taking office in 2017, Moon has restarted production on the inter-Korean railway and reopened the North and South collaborative Kaesong office (Ahn, 2020). These factors add to the political dialogue surrounding Korean reunification as Moon has made inter-Korean engagement one of his policy priorities. Though the engagement has increased, the Northern leadership is still focused on their personal agenda--nuclear proliferation. North and South Korea will remain

separated until both sides are actively in cooperation with the current policies but finding information even regarding South Korean citizens' perceptions of reunifying is difficult.

This research will explore the political stance of the younger generation of South Korean citizens and how they perceive inter-Korean collaboration. President Moon is focused on North Korean engagement and uncovering the perceptions of South Korean citizens will shed light on the societal connection with North Korea. The inter-Korean dialogue is very present within the United States in recent years, especially since the Northern nuclear threats of 2017. Since North Korea is a threat to the national security of the United States and South Korea is a known ally, the relationship among the three countries is sensitive. Many US citizens may wonder about South Korean citizens' stance on the inter-Korean collaboration, and as South Korea's pop culture influence rises world-wide, curiosity is inevitable. The goal of the research is to gain a better understanding of the situation from native South Koreans and then compare the data to previous literature discussions. The research will then reveal the trends and concerns of South Korean (SK) citizens regarding reunification and South Korea's global influence.

My research will focus on the harsh line that has divided the two countries, separating families, culture, ethnicities, and creating a divide more prominent than just a difference of governments. This project illustrates the perspectives of Korean reunification from South Korean exchange students at the University of Kansas. Understanding the situation from the views of South Korean citizens will foster better awareness of the inter-Korean issues. The argument begins with a literature review which explores the current discussions within inter-Korean dialogues. The research will present interviewee transcript data in order to offer statistics and insight into the views of the students. The analysis section answers the thesis question by discussing Korean identity, economics connections, soft power, and North Korean politics within

the interview data. The discussion section presents connections to the literature in existence and the discussions relevance to current world news.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on Korean reunification continuously compares the Korean situation with the German unification of the 90s. Scholars examine the commonalities of the two in order to explain the difficulties the Koreas could encounter, in parallel to the economic complications East and West Germany faced after reunifying. Millard (2018) discusses not only the economic hardships but also the social challenges Germany encountered after the reunification. Although any tangible flaws left by the forty-year division have almost vanished, the social divide is still far from recovered (Millard, 2018). In addition, Lee and Seo (2019) explain the desired future for either North or South Korea may not be unification. The German strategy, focusing on a quick political reunification while implementing policies to achieve social and economic unity later, is not feasible for North and South Korea due to the larger difference in economic relativity (Niederhafner, 2013). The scholars deter from the idea of using German's history as an economic road map for Korean unification as it does not apply well to the peninsula's economic or social situation due to the variance of year separation. Previous scholars tend to consider the situation from the capitalist perspective and lack explanation of the cultural differences of the two Korean countries.

Due to its large visibility and popularity, South Korea's popular culture (music, movies, celebrities, etc.), is often used as a tool to soften tensions with North Korea. Though many scholars have considered the possibilities within soft power usage, the tangible economic and social benefits the strategies have on the relationship is still in question, as North Korea's transparency is minimal. Lee (2009) focused on the ways South Korea should use the Korean

wave in order to avoid misuse of Korea's cultural assets but then concluded soft power is not effective enough to support diplomacy. On the other hand, Park and Bennet (2014) claim the inclusion of soft power in North Korea is detrimental to the relationship of the two countries and note the long-term effects of soft power usage. Lee explained the possibilities but lacked in providing any observation of progress from such soft power usages; but it should be noted the paper was written before the large influx of Korean pop culture all over the globe. Additionally, descriptions and personal accounts from the perspective of North Korean citizens would be ideal in understanding the reach of South Korea's pop culture influence.

Previous studies on the Korean relationship discuss the asymmetric socioeconomic Korean peninsula and provide economic strategy suggestions for North Korea. The studies on the relationship typically discuss the situation from the perspectives of economics and lack deep thought of the cultural and social differences. For example, Bradford, Kim, and Phillips (2011) note North Korea's need for a full market reform, efficient capital investment, and increases in infrastructure, but remain absent in analyzing the social needs. In contrast, Millard (2018) focused more on the social differences than most academic scholars concluding that the two Korean governments must take action to develop a social reunification policy identifying future problems of social integration and working to educate people in order to reduce the social divide. Generally, past research focuses on changing the economics of North Korea without considering the perspectives or desires of South Korea's citizens. My data will focus specifically on the social and political perspectives of the younger generation as it is difficult to find many articles accounting the social disparities of Koreans.

My research question will add on to the previous studies of Korean reunification and South Korea's increase in influence. In addition, it will focus on the younger generation of SK

citizens in order to understand the situation from a more current perspective. Previous research lacked thought of cultural and social consequences of unification, and also lacked much qualitative data of the younger generation. Many researchers have noted the complexity of the situation, but because my research will focus solely on the perceptions of South Korean students, I hope to narrow down the issue to a more compact demographic. I also plan to examine South Korea's use of soft power on North Korea and synthesize information from North Korea and South Korean databases in order to understand the situation from the perspectives from both countries. The research will continue to add to the discussions on the socioeconomics of the Koreas and the dialogue surrounding Korean reunification.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used interview transcriptions of South Korean exchange students studying at the University of Kansas. Within the interviews, I am seeking to understand the perspectives of the younger generation of Koreans ages 18-30, in regards to the policies of Korean reunification and its connection to South Korea's pop culture influence. After receiving and signing a research consent form, the students were asked thirty open-ended, discussion questions to gather personal insight into the Korean relationship and discuss the experiences of each interviewee. The interviewees' responses will then reveal and support the consistent trends found within the data. This type of data is required as previous research lacked deep thought of the cultural and the social consequences of unification, and also lacked much qualitative data of the younger South Koreans. The data is essential in understanding the differences and similarities of the separated Koreans and how social unification could be approached going forward.

In order to find interviewees, I visited Korean culture-based University clubs such as Korean Language Club and K-pop Dance Club. By visiting these clubs, I was able to come into

contact with South Korean exchange students at the University. The discussion questions are based on topics of Korean reunification, South Korea's relationship with North Korea, and South Korea's rise in global influence through pop culture. Some of these questions include: Do you feel your Korean national identity is different from the Korean identity in North Korea? How do you feel emotionally connected to North Korea? How do South Korean perceive North Korean defectors? I met with 9 exchange students from South Korea for individual thirty-minute to hour-long sessions over the course of three weeks. I met with the students at campus locations such as the library and the Union buildings. I asked the interviewees the afore-mentioned questions, voice recorded every interview, and then transcribed the interviews onto a word document. I asked more flexible and probing questions as needed for understanding. Currently in Lawrence, Kansas, I am restricted in interviewee options as I am not able to travel to South Korea to interview citizens personally.

I used interviewee data to find key patterns and trends with the interview sessions which allowed for more comprehensive understanding of the South Korean perspective. Organizing and thematizing the data revealed the common responses among the interviewees. Six different thematic codes were created after thoroughly overlooking the data and understanding the common variables. Each response in the data was given a code and then moved to a respective themed source file in order to create an organization system and also visualize the common trends. Then, each source file was analyzed by connecting the patterns of responses within the theme. My mentor suggested I use this form of organization and analysis as the amount of interview transcripts amounted to forty pages, far too long to visualize common responses. The smaller themed and organized transcript data was much more effective in revealing the patterns of perception.

ANALYSIS

Korean Identity and Culture

A critical factor to consider within discussions of reunification are the cultural differences between the two Korean countries. Korean identity is a controversial topic but understanding the South Korean perspective on the issue will help in approaching future reunification policies. Of the nine Koreans interviewed, only four agreed North and South Koreans have the same Korean identity; interviewees in disagreement believe due to the passage of time, the two countries have very different types of Korean identity. One interviewee in agreement to a cohesive identity stated, “I just call us Korea because I think we are the same people”. In contrast, Interviewee 7 explained, “We have completely different society systems and due to the passage of time, our language is a little different, the food is different, and even the clothes we wear are different”. However, much of North Korea still remains a mystery for even South Koreans. Understanding the social discrepancies between the two countries will be beneficial for both societal systems in the pursuit of unification.

In addition, four interviewees who felt the Korean identities of the two countries are separate also believe South Korea is not responsible to send aid to North Korea. As time passes, South Koreans are feeling less connected to North Korean issues and are feeling less of a need to assist North Korea. For instance, Interviewee 1 stated, “Some people think South Korea will receive negative repercussions from helping the North, we have had different paths for 70 years...”. The ambiguity of the North and the uncertainty of their intentions is another major cause for the hesitant desire to send aid to the North. Furthermore Interviewee 6 added, “I do not think we are responsible; we are doing it mostly for charity”. Sending aid to another country can help support more amicable relations between the two nations. *Responsible* is the key word in the

question--if South Koreans truly felt North and South Koreans have the same identity, sending aid should not be controversial. So, this supports the claim of younger South Koreans feeling less connected and less supportive of North Korea.

Table 1

<p>“Actually, because we have been separated for so long, we do have different identities. The government system is different, and the cultures are different, so we should try integrating them so we begin to have the same feelings” (Interviewee 2, personal communication, February 19th, 2020).</p>	<p>“It has more negative parts than positive. It will be very confusing for people to adjust. We have totally different society systems, the government system is different, the economy is different, and the laws are different. People will really be confused. We are adjusted to the current status and the way we work, study, and live. It would be hard for us to adjust. The positive part would be maybe, equality” (Interviewee 7, personal communication, February 26th, 2020).</p>
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Though, four different interviewees are in favor of sending economic aid and food assistance to North Korea. Additionally, these interviewees believe the two Koreas should be viewed as “one Korea” rather than two separate identities. “Same ancestors, same history--we are the same people so we need to be responsible for them, we cannot just abandon brothers and sisters” (Interviewee 9, personal communication, March 6th, 2020). Interviewee 7 views the two Koreas as separate identities but is understanding of the need to assist North Korea, “We do feel responsible for North Korean citizens and we want to help, but it is questionable if Kim Jong Un really uses the assistance for the people”. Due to the closed economic market of North Korea, understanding the country's true need for aid is unmeasurable. The lack of transparency is a

barrier to the inter-Korean relationship, North Korea will need to become sincere and convert to an open economy in order to gain support from South Korean citizens.

Pop culture, such as Korean music and film, could have the ability to reconnect the two countries and act as a soft power tool to improve the relations. Due to the rise in global popularity of South Korean pop culture goods, North Koreans are becoming more aware of popular Korean media. Two interviewees mentioned the increase of ability to access SK pop culture goods through Chinese markets. In addition, a new South Korean drama focused on life in North Korea; Interviewee 3 described the show: “I recently watched a South Korean romance television show about a North Korean guy and a South Korean woman falling in love, this could become a trend of South Korea trying to show more the public about North Korean culture.” “Music has the ability to connect countries but cannot be music offending North Korea or Kim Jong-Un” (Interviewee 5, personal communication, February 26th, 2020). Citizens may feel less fear and anxiety if the North becomes more normalized or exposed, and vice versa. The soft power potential within South Korea’s pop culture media could improve relations, either through public exposure or through cultural connections.

Economics

Many of the interviewees expressed interest in the economic benefits of collaborating with North Korea for labor assistance. During the interview discussions, the students revealed an interesting societal fact about the South Korean labor force—young Koreans are deferring from labor work and are solely interested in pursuing white collar jobs. “Young South Koreans do not want to work difficult jobs; most South Koreans want to work in companies, tall buildings, things like that... maybe utilizing more North Korean laborers may help our lack in factory workers...” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, February 19th, 2020). Interviewee 7 added,

“South Koreans nowadays are not willing to work for factories”. Economic engagement is the most favorable reunification policy among the students, above social engagement. The lack of factory workers in South Korea and the labor potential of North Korea supports the positive reactions of continuing economic collaboration.

All interviewees have hopeful perspectives of more joint collaboration activities between the two countries. Economic collaborations help in reconnecting the two countries while also assisting in the growth of North Korea’s economy. “If South Korea’s technology and the North’s resources were combined it would be a perfect combination” (Interviewee 8, personal communication, March 5th, 2020). As shown below in Table 2, Interviewee 7 explained just how beneficial economic collaboration could be, describing the need to utilize North Korean natural resources as the lack of resources in South Korea requires companies to import resources thus making the products more expensive. The resources of both countries fit together like pieces of a puzzle. Continuing economic collaboration could be not only economically beneficial for both countries but also be a step towards a similar economic and governmental system.

Table 2

<p>“Because we are lacking in resources, we must import them and that makes the products more expensive, and then it is not competitive in the global market. I do not think the North Korean government would let us do that. The one reason we think we should unite is because North Korea has a lot of resources” (Interviewee 7, personal communication, February 26th, 2020).</p>

North Korean Engagement Policies

Nevertheless, discussion on the South Korean government’s northern engagement

policies causes mixed reviews among the students. In terms of economic benefits, the students are open minded, but in terms of finding a cultural balance-six out of the nine students are not very optimistic on North Korean cultural engagement policies. “The South Korean government is trying too hard to rebuild the North Korea and South Korea connection, many Koreans think the engagements are very radical” (Interviewee 1, personal communication, February 18th, 2020). As shown in Table 3, one interviewee described President Moon as being very Pro-North Korea, explaining many Koreans are worried the president is trying to turn the country communist (Interviewee 4, personal communication, February 21st, 2020). Discussing North Korean issues with the students caused discomfort, the topic seems to be very taboo. However, the responses received on the issue of engagement reveal the disconnection between the two countries in which three interviewees avoided or denied when directly asked about cultural differences.

Table 3

“Because President Moon is trying hard, people worry our country might become more communist like North Korea. I think he is doing a good job; I like that he is trying, but my friends say, “who cares”, “why would you support NK so much, you have other things to care about”. Sometimes his policies are more about the care of North Korean people... and that upsets some South Koreans.” (Interviewee 9, personal communication, March 6th, 2020).

When discussing North Korean engagement policies, President Moon’s engagement attempts with China surface in order to support the interviewees claims of the President being more Pro-North Korea than previous presidents. China is communist, so for President Moon to

be actively engaging both China and North Korea is a concern of the students. Interviewee 8 described President Moon's desire to engage China rather than improving relations with the United States; "The President is trying to close English schools in South Korea and implement Chinese language programs into the school curriculums instead". English is ingrained into much of SK's language and culture; the students' concern of policy shifting towards Chinese engagement is an understandable fear. In terms of reunification or economic collaboration, a positive relationship with China could avoid an East Asian rivalry of North Korea.

Inter-Connection

The Koreas separated around 70 years ago, leaving the younger Koreans aged 18-30, nearly two generations removed from a unified Korea. Consequently, young South Koreans are feeling less emotionally connected to North Korean issues. All interviewees agreed the lack of the North Korean connection in South Korea, especially for the younger South Koreans, has created a rift in the dialogue of reunification policies. Interviewee 1 explained the younger generations' tendencies to oppose reunification due to the absence of a cultural and a government connection. Furthermore, Interviewee 4 added "As the generations get younger and younger, we have less interest in reunifying and we do not receive much education on the situation." If South Koreans do not feel as if North Koreans have the same Korean identity, the alacrity of rejoining will not be favorable, as the distance is creating a social and cultural gap between the two Koreas. The two governments will need to consider the perspectives of young Koreans and recognize the differences of the people.

The cross-border family connection between the two countries assisted in retaining social communication, but after 70 years many of the connections are no longer passed down to the younger Koreans. Out of the nine Koreans interviewed, only three still have family in North

Korea. “Blood wise, relationship wise, I am not very close to my family in North Korea so I think the connection will stop there after my mom passes away” (Interviewee 9, personal communication, March 6th, 2020). “South Korea had many separated families, but the amount has decreased substantially and many of the families never had the chance to meet again,” Interviewee 4 added. The family connection supported many of South Korea’s previous engagement policies with North Korea but as the bond dwindles, South Koreans began to question the justification for future engagement. The South Korean government will need to find ways to retain the Korean connection in order to maintain the plausibility for reunification.

North Korean defectors escaping to South Korea might be replacing the generational distance of blood relatives from the initial Korea split. At the same time, North Koreans often face discrimination in South Korea and SKs are not all in support of accepting refugees. “Discrimination against refugees is common in the South, so North Koreans tend to hide the northern attributes such as the northern accent and clothing styles” (Interviewees 5, 7, 8, 9, personal communication, February-March 2020). Interviewees also expressed the monetary concerns of housing and assisting refugees, such as an increase of taxes and budget disbursement (Interviewees 3, 4, personal communication, February-March 2020). “We do not want to pay taxes for North Korean refugees, we want to pay for things that will actually affect Korean citizens” (Interviewee 4, personal communication, February 21st, 2020). Refugees and immigrants are constantly a controversial topic within democracies, both countries need to find ways to normalize the social differences in order to avoid such disparities. Continuing economic collaborations between the two will also assist in creating more symmetric economies and thus removing the focus and stress from South Korea’s economy.

Table 4

<p>“There are not many positive perspectives on North Korean refugees because it’s like they are taking our jobs away or we are spending our budget to support them. We do not want to pay tax for North Korean refugees, we want to pay for things that actually affect Korean citizens. But the numbers are increasing day by day. It will be hard for the government to handle the budget” (Interviewee 4, personal communication, February 21, 2020).</p>	<p>“They might get scared someone would tell the police or that they would be discriminated against. I heard most refugees don’t tell others because they are worried their children would get bullied in school. That is why they do not go to school meetings. Other parents do not want to be friends with them” (Interviewee 7, personal communication, February 26, 2020).</p>
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Reunification

The most common concern among the interviewees was the economic burden of reunification. The current asymmetry of the two economies could collapse South Korea’s economy, as witnessed during the German reunification of West and East Germany. Interviewees are well aware of the fragility of unification; Interviewee 4 explained, “South Korea would probably experience an economic crisis because our economic difference is so large.” Interviewee 3 agreed, “We have been apart too long, the economic gap is too great, so I do not think reunifying is possible.” Interviewee 9 added some insight to the reasoning, “We are being a little selfish, money is the main reason young South Koreans do not think it is a good idea to try reunification.” Monetary concerns are logical as young Koreans are in the beginning stages of developing personal wealth. Absorbing North Korea without proper economic pre-steps could cause a catastrophic economic crash in South Korea; approaching reunification slowly--over the

course of decades--will soften the disparities between the two countries' economies.

Continuing economic collaboration between the Koreas is the most effective and reasonable option to balance the economies and also preserve the inter-Korean connection. Nearly all the interviewees hope for reunification but note the complexity of the situation and thus conclude total economic and country reunification is moderately unlikely. For example, Interviewee 8 believes fully reunifying economically difficult, the best option would be to remain separate countries but allow for travel and trade. Interviewee 9 analyzed the need for economic symmetry, "Economic collaboration is beneficial for both countries, also leading to more of a smooth economic integration if the two economies do collapse together." Economic collaborations as well as free access to travel and trade will be the catalyst for reunifying the two countries. Though, the collaborations will only be successful if North Korea's leadership cooperates with South Korea's treaty policies, such as the discontinuation of nuclear proliferation.

At the same time, the South Korean public is unaware and anxious of the political intentions of North Korea. In other words, if North Korea continues to remain enigmatic, the progress towards reunification will be unlikely. The South Korean public is often concerned about the intentions of North Korea's leadership, "The reason South Korea stopped the first economic collaboration project was due to North Korea using the profits to fund the nuclear projects" (Interviewee 9, Personal Communication, March 6th, 2020). Interviewee 9 added, "I want to encourage our government to continue collaboration but, only with the guarantee ordinary people will receive proper pay and the profits will not be used for northern nuclear projects". The difference in government systems and leadership is the main reason behind the

economic conflicts. North Korea's abrupt decisions and nuclear explorations leaves the South Korean public feeling weary of the two countries' relations.

DISCUSSION

Economic Collaborations

The Koreas have been noticeably present in current world news; whether through North Korean political activities or through South Korean popular culture, many are aware of the multifaceted Korean politics. Therefore, continuing economic collaboration between the Koreas is the most effective and reasonable option to balance the economies and also preserve the inter-Korean connection. Moon Jae-in's North Korean policy includes the "3-Nos": "No desire for the North collapse, no pursuit of unification by absorption, and no pursuit of unification through artificial means" (Ministry of Unification, n.d.). Seoul's continuous endeavor to engage Pyongyang and to find mutually acceptable steps towards political reconciliation, military confidence-building, and economic cooperation is a relatively stable track of inter-Korean dialogues (Suzuki, T, 2019, p. 373). In addition, the continuation of economic collaboration was favored at 88% among the interviewees, stating the North Korean natural resources to be of great value to South Korea. Considering the idea is favorable among interviewees, South Korea is open to economic relations, so the issues with Korea's reunification lie mainly within the social and political discrepancies. In recognizing the public's perceptions less confusion and fear will be paired with Korea's interrelations, leading to more development.

Korean Popular Culture

The increased consumption of Korean pop culture globally has led to many academic discussions on the power of Korean soft power. As South Korean pop culture becomes more prevalent, North Korean citizens will inevitably be more exposed to South Korea. For example,

new South Korean television drama, *Crash Landing on You*, focuses on a cross-border North and South Korean romance, has achieved the highest viewership ratings in history, and is an accurate representation of North Korean life--thanks to a North Korean defector assisting the writing team (Choi, 2020). “The show revealed the possibility of communication and human connection; the show was really famous in the South so maybe it changed how people perceive North Korean life” (Interviewee 7, personal communication, February 26, 2020). Lee (2009) adds, the Korean wave or *Hallyu*, which is the influx on Korean popular culture worldwide, can contribute to soft power by providing opportunities for the manipulation of Korea’s images, extending a network effect of Korean Popular culture, and producing international influential celebrities. Considering the popularity and success of *Crash Landing on You*, South Korea may continue creating similar content in hopes to reconcile the tensions between the two countries and elevate the attractiveness factor of South Korea to the North.

North Korean Discrimination in the South

Academic literature often does not explore the ambiguity of the two Korea’s cultural asymmetry. Education and understanding of the differences between the two country’s Korean culture will minimize North Korean discrimination and cultural disconnection between the two Koreas. For example, Interviewee 4 explained “Because we have been separated for a while our identities are different, and I feel like most South Koreans have hostility towards North Koreans.” Choi (2018) focused on the North Korean perspective of migration to the South, concluding the ways of identifying and dealing with North Koreans in South Korea have been influenced by a political environment constructed by international and domestic politics and inter-Korean relations. As of December 2019, a total of 33,523 North Korean defectors have entered South Korea (Ministry of Unification, n.d.). With more open discussion and

understanding of North Korean refugees, discrimination and weariness of North Korea will naturally decline. Scholars should consider focusing more on approaches to ease North Korean communities into the well-established South Korean society.

Reunification

Furthermore, previous research disciplines focus on the economic disparities, however the social differences are just as significant within Korean reunification dialogues. Even though the younger generations of humanity tend to be more liberal and globalized (Parker, Graf, Igielnik, 2019), younger South Koreans remain apprehensive of total reunification with the North. South Korea is an ethnically homogenous nation with a small history of immigration and aversion to multiculturalism (Bidet, 2009; W. Jeon, 2000). Out of the 9 South Koreans interviewed, total reunification was only favored at 44 percent compared to the 88 percent positivity of solely economic collaborations. “I feel like some South Koreans would ignore the North Koreans, because we have more education and resource technology... Most people at least have hope for unification, but it is just hard to think about how it can actually be done--we are scared about what we will have to suffer.” Much of the nervousness of total reunification is rooted in the difference of government and North Korean use of nuclear weapons. In addition to more open discussion on North Korean society, one with cultural, lingual, and social differences--emphasis on pop-culture soft power and economic collaborations will bring more attention to South Korea’s societal concerns.

CONCLUSION

Lack of social connection and understanding between the citizens of the Koreas will continue to be a roadblock for any progress of complete Korean reunification. In other words, the social disparities are less apparent than the economic disparities, but the inequality is hindering

any reunification progress. North Korean discrimination is still very prevalent in South Korea, even among the younger generations, which is simply due to the lack of conversation and awareness on the topic. Continuing to avoid interconnection amongst the two will lead to even more distance, consequently causing reunification to be less favorable and thus less plausible. A majority of the young South Koreans were shown to be disconnected from North Korean issues, viewing the two Korea's as separate countries--not only in government but also in culture. The most helpful resources to foster more interconnection may be popular culture, and it seems South Koreans have an interest in learning more about North Korea through such outlets. Economic collaboration is the first step to progress and retaining the Korean inter-connection but understanding the social differences and creating focused suggestions is necessary within future academic discussions. Social policies, such as implementation of North Korean culture into the school curriculum and continuous social discussions need to occur for reunification to be successful. Korean reunification is a much larger discussion than the younger generation realizes, more conversation needs to exist in order to create more possibilities for the Koreans.

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