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“A History of Heartache”: Korean Reunification through the Eyes of Giseong Sedae

Johanna Avalyn Cooper
University of Mississippi

“A History of Heartache”:
Korean Reunification through the Eyes of *Giseong Sedae*

By Johanna A. Cooper

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Approved:

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Advisor: Dr. Kate Centellas

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Reader: Dr. Zachary Adamz

_____
Reader: Dr. Gang Guo

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Abstract

In this thesis, I analyze answers provided by middle-aged South Koreans (*Giseong Sedae*, ages 40 to 69) to determine what factors have influenced this generation's perceptions of Korean reunification. Utilizing a survey and interviews, I first measure the general views of South Korean participants within this age range. The survey results show that the majority of respondents want Peaceful Coexistence reunification without foreign influence. In interviews, participants' answers are divided into six main factors that affect their views of reunification which include hesitancies toward reunification, the tenacity of *Han Minjok*, familial ties to division, anti-communist education, political affiliation, and religiosity. Regardless whether respondents were for or against reunification, all members of *Giseong Sedae* in this study wanted peaceful coexistence on the Peninsula. Though there is question of how this translates into pragmatic action, factors from this generation's upbringing and education, family ties to division, and personal affiliations to religious and political ideas all point to the necessity of North and South Korean reconciliation.

Note on Romanization and Translation

I follow the Revised Romanization of Korea system for the romanization of Korean text, except for the works and names that have specific conventions, such as Rhee Syngman. All translations from Korean to English are my own unless explicitly stated.

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CHAPTER 1: *URI-UI SOWON*

CONSIDERING THE "HOPE" FOR REUNIFICATION

Uri-ui Sowon

During the years leading up to the Korean War, the children's song "*Uri-ui Sowon* (우리의 소원, Our Wish)" was written in 1947 by father Ahn Seok-ju and composed by his son Ahn Byeong-won (NamuWiki [a], 2022). Out of a composition of Korean Independence Day children's songs, *Uri-ui Sowon* is the only one still sung to this day, often performed at inter-Korean peace performances. The lyrics are as follows:

"우리의 소원은 통일 Our wish is reunification

꿈에도 소원은 통일 Even in our dreams, our wish is reunification

이 정성 다해서 통일 With all of our sincerity, reunification

통일을 이루자 Let us realize reunification

이 겨레 살리는 통일 Reunification that saves this nation

이 나라 찾는데 통일 In search of this country, reunification

통일이여 어서오라 Reunification, hurry and come

통일이여 오라 Reunification, come"

In 2013, composer Ahn Byeong-won shared in an interview that he "wish[ed he] could stop singing this song now" (NamuWiki [a], 2022). Why did he want to stop singing a song he had composed that had held such a strong legacy? Well, he hoped unification would come soon and that *Uri-ui Sowon*, which symbolizes the pain of division, would disappear into history (NamuWiki [a], 2022). "Please, I hope that 'Our Wish is Unification' becomes an old song. My last wish is to conduct the last 'Our Wish' chorus at Panmunjom on the day of unification" (Kim, 2013).

However, Mr. Ahn passed away in 2015, unable to see the two Koreas unify in accordance with his own wish, like many others (NamuWiki [a], 2022). A majority of those from the generation who directly experienced Korean division have passed away, and the generation twice removed from the war (MZ 세대, *MZ Sedae*, MZ Generation) are becoming adults and gaining influence in Korean society. With each passing day, the desperation for reunification expressed by Mr. Ahn is dwindling in the South.

Thesis Overview

This thesis aims to examine the various attitudes and motivations of South Korea's current *Giseong Saedae* (기성세대) — middle-aged (ages 40 to 69) individuals who lived through the tumultuous years following Korean division in 1945.[1] At the end of World War II and with formal organization of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereby referred to as North Korea or DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (hereby referred to as South Korea or ROK) in 1948, ideological tensions surfaced, and the Korean War erupted in 1950. After the

[1] *Giseong Sedae* literally means "the older generation that is leading the current society" and generally refers to those in their 40s to late 60s.

armistice agreement that paused the Korean War in 1953, constant political tension has caused the two states to falter between the brink of war and possibilities of peace over the past six decades. Interestingly, future reunification of the divided Peninsula is an ever-present option that has never left the minds of leaders and civilians alike. To this day, this topic is also divisive, as there exists both those adamantly for and against reunification, and within the same side yet exist differing motivations. Even still, there are those caught in the middle, who are indecisive about reunification. The possibility of reunification is extremely relevant to not only modern-day North and South Korea, but numerous other actors, whose geo-political, international security, and additional considerations are intertwined as well.

In conversations with Korean citizens, both the young and the elderly have views consistent with peers of their same age group. However, middle-aged Korean citizens (hereby referred to as *Giseong Sedae*) seem to have the most varying opinions on the topic of reunification compared to their peers. There are countless surveys that quantitatively demonstrate the sentiments of Korean citizens regarding Korean reunification. What makes this research different is that, alongside gathering personal opinions, I examine the themes and motivations that consistently emerged within responses to my survey and interviews and investigate their connection to the current *Giseong Sedae*'s views on North Korea and the topic of reunification.

As shown in this thesis, reunification proved to be something on all participants' minds. No one said, "I have never thought about reunification before!" — all respondents had something to say about the topic. These members of *Giseong Sedae* all expressed a desire for a joint Korean coalition in some form or fashion, although not everyone used the word "reunification" to describe their desired outcome. Yet there are nuances to these answers; even married couple respondents had distinct and varying opinions about their perspectives on the

division and hypothetical reunification of Korea. Ultimately, the majority of *Giseong Sedae* cling to a collective vision for full reunification, while others want a peaceful coexistence that mirrors reunification, allowing for inter-Peninsular travel and socio-cultural exchange without merging economic and political systems.

CHAPTER 2: "WE HAVE BEEN SEPARATED FOR SO LONG"

HISTORY OF A DIVIDED PENINSULA AND DIVIDED FAMILIES

Historical Context

From anti-communism that defined the founding of the South under Rhee Syngman, the military coup by Park Chunghee and his reopening of discussion between North and South, the political turmoil of the 1980s and 1990s leading to not only a democratized state but also increased cultural exchange between the North and South, to today's nuclear North and volatile Peninsular relations, these events have characterized the *Giseong Saedae*'s interaction with the North and therefore directly influence their conceptions of reunification. This section describes the historical context on the issue of division and reunification on the Korean peninsula, providing background on various historical happenings that directly or indirectly affected *Giseong Saedae*'s perceptions of North Korea and reunification.

Regional factionalization has existed on the Korean Peninsula well before the division of Korea in 1945, but for this thesis, I will begin with this division. As mentioned above, North and South Korea have been separated since 1945 (Chamberlin, 2004, 3). After Japan's surrender in WWII, the Korean peninsula was liberated from decades of Japanese Occupation, but was soon divided between Soviet (North) and American (South) occupation at the 38th parallel. Cold War politics and ideological disparities amongst the Korean populace (and foreign powers) on the country's political trajectory literally split the nation in half. Years of rebuilding and political debate regarding government structurization led to the Republic of Korea and Democratic People's Republic of Korea being founded separately. The ROK was established on August 15, 1948 under US-backed president Rhee Syngman, whereas the DPRK was established on September 9, 1948 under USSR and PRC-backed Kim Il-sung as Premier.

After continual skirmishes at the border between the North and South's military forces, North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. This war ravaged the peninsula, and finally came to a halt with an armistice agreement in 1953. This prompted the Soviet Union and United States to divide the peninsula loosely along the 38th parallel, where the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is located today. From this point on, the war has never officially ended, and the two nations have remained separated.

The remainder of the 1950s, tension between the two Koreas remained high. President Rhee continued promoting and "fighting for total victory and national reunification on his (ROK) terms…At the Geneva Conference in 1954, the ROK repeated its pre-war terms for reunification, i.e. free elections under U.N. supervision to fill the vacant seats reserved for representatives from the north. North Korea's rejection of these terms justified advocacy of military means to bring about reunification" (Kim, 1986, 4). This justification led to Rhee's use of the phrase, "*Bukchin Tongi* (북진통일) "(북진통일)" — March North for Unification/Unification by Marching North. However, Rhee was unsuccessful in rallying the nation (and the approval of the United States) for a second round of the Korean War.

The 1960s began with unrest in South Korea, with the presidential elections (fourth term of President Rhee) leading to the April Movement, a student protest that pressured Rhee into resignation and exile. Though the new government had support from the populace, their failure to effectively lead the nation caused further unrest, giving way to General Park Chung-hee's May 16 Coup d'état. Officially, the North and South Korean governments remained without contact during this decade and skirmishes continued at the DMZ. In 1968, North Korean commandos made an unsuccessful assassination attempt on President Park (previously General)

by attempting to raid the Blue House (Korean presidential residence). This attack shook the nation and further escalated tensions between the North and South.

During the 1970s, there was a noticeable shift in South Korean policy toward reunification for the positive. This shift can be compared to the strategy of West Germany before German reunification, which was "to establish economic[, cultural,] and political ties with [the neighboring] socialist country" (Jonnson, 2006, 50). For South Korean President Park, such ties could particularly prove influential to the South, as the South had just begun economically surpassing North Korea during this time. Although the North had proposed similar solutions in the past (which had been consistently rejected by the South), the nation rejected the South's proposals for establishing these ties and other relation-normalizing policies. Instead, the North was focused on a more instantaneous solution of a confederation (The Democratic Confederal Republic of Korea, DCRK), and advocated for this since Kim Il-sung first introduced the idea during the 1960s (Jonnson, 2006, 51; Uri Minjok-kkiri).

However, following the reestablishment of relations between the United States and China by President Nixon, North and South Korea released the "North-South Joint-Communiqué (남북공동 성명 *Nambukgongdong Seongmyeong*)" on July 4, 1972. This took place after a series of secret talks held between the North and South during 1971. The document outlined three reunification principles: (1) reunification without foreign interference, (2) reunification through peaceful means, and (3) reunification preceded by trans-ideological national unity (UN, Joint Communique, 1972). That same year, the South-North Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was established. Not only were talks surrounding economic, political, and cultural matters held regularly, but also Red Cross talks about reuniting divided families. The SNCC talks continued

until 1975 and Red Cross talks until 1978, ending without significant progress (Jonnson, 2006, 56).

Some of the major happenings of this period caused these talks to abruptly come to an end, heightening already deep-seated anti-North Korean and anti-communist sentiments within the South. One was the 1974 discovery of (the first of multiple) North Korean tunnel systems (남침용 땅굴 *Namchimyong Ttanggul*) under the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), actively being dug for the purpose of invading the South. Another was the assassination attempt on South Korean President Park which took place that same year (Halloran, 1974; Jonnson, 2006, 56). The first tunnel was discovered on November 20th by a South Korean Army patrol, who noticed steam rising from the ground, alerting them to something amiss. Five days later, on November 25th, US and South Korean military personnel were exploring the tunnel when a North Korean explosive device detonated inside the tunnel, causing the death of US Navy Commander Robert M. Ballinger and ROK Marine Corps Major Kim Hah-chul, as well as wounded five American soldiers and one South Korean soldier from the United Nations Command (NamuWiki [b], 2022). This discovery led to subsequent discoveries of three other tunnels in 1975, 1978, and 1990, respectively. However, there are believed to be twenty more tunnels just like these that remain undiscovered.

The First Tunnel [제 1 땅굴 Jae 1 Ttanggul*]* (beetle55, 2012)[2]

The assassination attempt on President Park rocked the nation; although the President himself was not assassinated, his wife and the South's First Lady, Yuk Young-soo, was killed by a bullet meant for Park. The assassin, Moon Se-gwang, was a Japanese-born Korean (known as Zainichi Korean) DPRK and communist sympathizer. He came in contact with North Korean agents in Japan who convinced him to help plan the assassination of President Park in order to bring about a people's revolution in South Korea (NamuWiki [c], 2022). After the First Lady's assassination, the ROK government declared a national emergency. Of course, as stated in the 1974 article by the New York Times, this announcement "made little real difference to life [in South Korea], since President Park [had] assumed unlimited powers in recent months" (Halloran, 1974).

Preceded by both these events and a politically tumultuous end to the 1970s due to the sudden assassination of President Park by his right-hand man and KCIA director (a power struggle with no connection to North Korea), South Korea entered a period of extreme flooding that affected multiple regions in the country. Interestingly enough, North Korea offered food and

[2] Note: In this photo, the word "*Tongil*-ro (통일로)," or "Reunification Road," is clearly inscribed on the side of the tunnel. It can be inferred that, from the perspective of North Korea, by taking this "road" (tunnel) into the South, North Korean soldiers are on the "road to reunification" by means of invasion.

material aid to its suffering Southern neighbor (Jonnson, 2006, 56; KBS World, 2018). South Korea uncharacteristically accepted this olive branch, thawing the relationship that had been frozen for almost a decade. Talks mirroring those of the mid-1970s were resumed. Red Cross talks ultimately proved successful, with the first fellowship activity of divided families taking place in 1985, which are discussed later (Kim, 1986, 3, 12; Jonnson, 2006, 56). Sadly, these steps forward were followed by leaps backward, as North Korea not only "suspended all dialogue in 1986" due to US-South Korean joint military exercises, but shot down a "South Korean civilian aircraft in 1987" (Jonnson, 2006, 56).

The following year completely changed the trajectory of the modern South Korean political system. The South Korean democratic movement (민주화 운동 *Minjuhwa Undong*) came to a head with the first real democratic election in decades promised by President Roh Tae-woo, who faced immense political pressure not only in the aftermath of the Gwangju Uprising, but also in preparation for the fast-approaching 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics (Johnson, 2001). This marked the end of the South's authoritarian government. President Roh did not pursue a completely hardline political stance toward North Korea. Instead, he turned to a strategy reminiscent of the early 1970s with *Nordpolitik* ("Northern Policy" in German), a policy aimed at normalizing relations with North Korean allies, including China and the Soviet Union (Jonnson, 2006, 50, 56, 59). Indirect trade picked up between the two countries starting in 1988, and eventually evolved into fully direct trade in 1990.

Jumping back to the early 1980s, outside the political sphere, a significant cultural phenomenon was taking place in the South. Being in the world spotlight before the Olympics, South Korea attempted to maintain a peaceful atmosphere on the Peninsula. To commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Armistice, the Korean Broadcast System (KBS) television program

Isan Gajok-eul Chatseumnida (이산 가족을 찾습니다) or *Finding Separated Families*, began airing in 1983. As the title implies, the purpose of this program was to find and reconnect family members who were separated by the Korean War. The applications for this show were so numerous that the show took on 600 more cases than originally planned. On national television, South Koreans watched for 138 days as ordinary people successfully found long-lost family members. Two of my interviewees specifically mentioned this show when discussing familial connections to the Korean War. They both recounted how South Koreans across the country cried alongside those on the TV screen. This program not only changed the lives of the separated families; it transformed into a collective experience, a synecdoche of Korean reunification.

Photo from Finding Separated Families *Live Broadcast* (KBS, 1983)

Continuing on the theme of "peace on the Peninsula" which preceded the 1988 Seoul Olympics, North and South Korea held the very first meeting of separated families since the Korean War in 1985. Though it is unclear how the families were selected to participate, 50 separated family members from the two Koreas were chosen to meet the relatives they had been separated from in a Seoul hotel room (Haberman, 1985). The meeting was extremely emotional for two reasons: not only was this the first time these family members had met in over three decades, but the meeting was cut short by North Korean officials, who "accused the visitors from South Korea of dispensing anti-communist propaganda while meeting with their relatives" (Shelton, 2020). This was the first and last family reunion to take place until almost two decades later, in the year 2000.

Shifting back to international relations, the South Korean government kept to the aforementioned policy of *Nordpolitik* by finally establishing diplomatic relations with the USSR in the year 1990. The first talks between Korean Prime Ministers also took place during this year. In 1991, after numerous rounds of meetings, North Korea stopped objecting to having separate Korean UN representatives, leading to both Koreas' entrance into the UN. With this momentum, things were looking up for the Peninsula.

In 1992, the Basic Agreement (also the "Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation") was ratified. The goals of this agreement outlined respecting each country's political system, to promote economic cooperation, as well as continue working on family reunification projects and ultimately formally ending the Korean War. Although the Basic Agreement was not binding, it may have paved the way for better cooperation and

relations during this era (Jonnson, 2006, 57). One of these is the Mount Kumgang tourist venture, which will be discussed later.

Unfortunately, in 1992, North Korea's suspected nuclear ambitions transformed Korean relations for the rest of modern history. Although the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea held the North to freezing their proliferation, allowing international inspection, and converting military use reactors to light water reactors, the damage was done, as the North's nuclear objectives marked a shift in the South's approach to inter-Korean relations. President Kim Young-sam placed Southern forces on high alert due to fear of attack or possible collapse of the DPRK. To make matters worse, President Kim's administration failed to send condolences for Kim Il-sung's death in 1994 and criticized South Korean leaders who did provide condolences. President Kim shifted to a hardline stance for the rest of his presidency.

However, the following president, Kim Daejung, completely redirected South Korean policy toward the North with the famous Sunshine Policy (햇볕정책 *Haetbyeot Jeongchaek*) announced in 1998 (Jonnson, 2006, 61). This policy was based on "positive engagement in the spirit of the Basic Agreement" created a few years before (Jonnson, 2006, 61). Reforms to South Korean policy were made in multiple areas, such as allowing South Korean businesses to negotiate directly with Northern counterparts and South Korean citizens visitation to Pyongyang without prior consent from the Southern government (though an official invitation from the North and written safety guarantee were both required) (Jonnson, 2006, 61).

Regardless of this shift in policy, there were still numerous bumps in the road for President Kim's new administration. Multiple meetings in Beijing ended in failure for a variety of reasons. However, the key issue laid in the fact that, though the South viewed the matters

discussed at these meetings as socio-cultural, the North viewed everything as political — including something as seemingly unpolitical as divided family reunions (which had not taken place since the first meeting in 1985) (Jonnson, 2006, 67). These clashes came to a head in 1998, with the testing of North Korea's first long range missile (Jonnson, 2006, 68).

It is speculated that much of the political turmoil during this time was triggered by North Korean hard-liners who were upset with the two nations' cooperation regarding Mount Kumgang (Jonnson, 2006, 66-67). The agreement on Mount Kumgang continued, however, and its joint development was regarded a success of President Kim's Sunshine Policy by "separating economics and politics" (Jonnson, 2006, 61). Though visits by South Koreans and foreigners were more like "pre-arranged tours" instead of organic tourism, the venture was popular and viewed quite favorably by Korean citizens (Jonnson, 2006, 61-62). Along with this success, increased economic joint ventures and some socio-cultural exchanges were pursued (Jonnson, 2006, 62), including a 1999 agreement signed between the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) and the Korea Electric Power Corporation, planning to construct two light water reactors (Jonnson, 2006, 62-63). Not only was this project expected to further expand Korean exchanges, but was also viewed as a step toward solving the newly occurring nuclear threat (Jonnson, 2006, 63-64).

By the beginning of the 2000s, informal talks between the two Koreas had been taking place, which led to a summit in mid-2000. Though it was to be held from June 12th through 14th, it was delayed to the 13th through 15th, as North Korea was waiting for a secret payout of economic aid as incentive to participate (Jonnson, 2006, 72). These meetings led to the historic Five Point North-South Joint Declaration. This document proclaimed that reunification was a goal to be achieved, but only while acknowledging the different political frameworks at play,

pledged further economic cooperation, and promised to host more divided family reunions, but with the condition that it be conducted following certain rules correctly so as to mitigate possible disappointment (which happened in 1985) (Jonnson, 2006, 72-73). This joint declaration did not discuss political or military matters, though — even generally (Jonnson, 2006, 72).

At first, divided family reunions continued as normal. However, the second set of reunions was delayed due to a scandal with the Red Cross Korea president, who discussed North Korea in a negative light during an interview (Jonnson, 2006, 73). Although the reunions continued after this, North Korea became hesitant to follow the South's wishes in expanding reunion projects (Jonnson, 2006, 73-74). The Sunshine Policy remained somewhat controversial until the end of Kim Dae-jung's presidency, as the opposition conservative party voiced dissatisfaction with the financial burden the policy was placing on the South. This is opposed to the liberal party, which viewed the Sunshine Policy as a net positive in the long run, hopeful that North Korean society might change due to increased economic exchange (Jonnson, 2006, 75).

In the years following the early 2000s, inter-Korean relations have been permeated by nuclear concerns. In 2004, North Korea reaffirmed its missile test moratorium, yet fired a short-range missile into the Sea of Japan/East Sea during 2005. The following year, the North tested not only another missile, but conducted a nuclear test. Although a second summit between Korean leaders was held again, this time with President Roh Moo-hyun, the DPRK fired a short-range missile into the Sea of Japan/East Sea once again. This pattern continues into the next decade.

Although only twenty years had passed since the death of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il passed away in 2011, immediately placing Kim Jong-un in power as Supreme Leader of North Korea. The North began testing weapons again in 2012. Then, in 2013, President Park Geun-hye

(daughter of former President Park Chung-hee) was elected as the first female president in South Korea. Her presidential term began with anticipation for improvements in inter-Korean relations. During President Park's first New Year's Presidential Press Conference in 2014, she shared her planned endeavors for inter-Korean cooperation and, ultimately, pursuit of reunification. In her speech, Park famously said, "I know that there are some people who think that unification is not necessary because the cost of unification is too high. But I think, in a word, 'Reunification is [like hitting] a jackpot (통일은 대박이다 *Tongil-eun Daebak-ida*).'…I think that the reunification of the Korean Peninsula is an opportunity for our economy to make a huge leap (forward)" (Seo, 2014; Nam, 2014; Lee, E., 2014; MediaVOP, 2014).

Of course, not everyone approved of her statement. President Park's wording was ill-received by members of the Korean public, as *Daebak,* , much like the English word "jackpot," is a term associated with gambling. People voiced their criticism online with comments such as "Is reunification like gambling? [통일은 도박입니까? *Tongil-eun Dobak-ibneeka?*]", "We should not approach unification with the same logic as gambling", and "Using the slang word 'jackpot' at a public press conference lowers national dignity" (Nam, 2014).

Despite President Park's seemingly positive view of reunification, she was known as a hardliner in terms of policy toward North Korea. Throughout her presidency, North Korea did not stop conducting weapon and nuclear tests that had resumed in 2012, of which included the DPRK's successful test-launch of their first intercontinental ballistic missiles (Boghani, 2018). These weapons were some of the most successful and dangerous that the DPRK had ever tested at the time. This prompted the South to react increasingly antagonistically, worsening inter-Korean relations for the time being.

However, President Park was unable to complete her presidency, as she was impeached in 2016. The following, and current, administration, led by President Moon Jae-in, is known for his less hardline stance toward inter-Korean policy, in part due to his own familial ties to the North. During the 2017 Displaced Persons Cultural Festival (실향민 축제 *Shilhyangmin Chukjae*), he shared: "My parents are displaced North Koreans (실향민 *Shilhyangmin*). During the Korean War, they came to Geoje by boat during the Hungnam Evacuation, and I was born as a son of a displaced person and grew up in a refugee village, so from an early age I saw and felt what it means and how painful it is to lose one's hometown" (Lee, 2017; Arirang, 2017).

Although President Moon's efforts to lower inter-Korean tension did not seem successful at first, a breakthrough took place in April 2018 with the third-ever Inter-Korean Summit. This meeting was unprecedented both literally and symbolically, as Kim Jong-un was invited and stepped into South Korean territory, the first time a North Korean leader did so since 1953. President Moon did the same, briefly stepping into North Korean territory. This momentum continued with the US's Trump administration, when the hardline government suddenly became involved in an historic US-DPRK summit in June 2018, when Kim Jong-un became the first North Korean leader to meet a sitting US President. President Moon met with Kim Jong-un a second time before the June summit in May. With these developments, inter-Korean relations were in a better place than they had been in decades.

However, Korean relations were still strained, and have subsequently returned to a similar place as when President Moon first took office. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of nations have been forced to hyper-focus on domestic issues, and this is no different in both North and South Korea. Kim Jong-un has continued proliferation and weapons testing for

multiple years since the aforementioned summits. A recent test conducted in September shocked nuclear experts around the world, with the North claiming to have succeeded in testing a hypersonic missile (Masterson, 2021).

In the South, President Moon's term is coming to an end, and candidate Yoon Suk-yeol was selected in March 2022 to become the 13th president of South Korea. Yoon has described North Korea as the South's "main enemy," and even "pledged to bolster missile defenses and secure preemptive strike capability against any potential attack" (Bernal, 2022). This approach contrasts with the Moon administration's relatively peaceful methods (Martin & Yoon, 2022). As of March 16th, president-elect Yoon stated he will appoint a "North Korea Human Rights Ambassador (북한인권대사 *Bukhan Ingwon Daesa*)," a seat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) which has not been filled in five years; it was not filled during the Moon administration in an effort to ameliorate inter-Korean relations (Kim, 2022). Even with only weeks left until Yoon is officially inaugurated, it seems that the South will likely enter a new policy era regarding North Korea and reunification efforts.

The Korean War may not be remembered by the current *Giseong Sedae* (whose oldest members were born immediately following the end of the Korean War), but they have personally experienced everything since the division of Korea. The events outlined above are mere highlights of what these members of Korean society have experienced; there are individual-scale repercussions to everything discussed in this section that directly influence how *Giseong Sedae* view North Korea and the prospect of reunification. In the context of the historical narrative preceding it, we will now move on to discuss what a sample of *Giseong Sedae* truly thinks.

CHAPTER 3: *GISEONG SEDAE*

MEASURING THE MIDDLE GENERATION

Survey Design

To conduct this research, I developed an online survey to gather basic data on participants' views on reunification (prior to all interviews). The survey contained majority close-ended questions, but did include some open-ended questions where respondents could further explain their close-ended answers. Surveyees also had the choice to opt into a separate interview at the end of the survey.

This study was distributed via non-probability, voluntary response convenience sampling to 32 middle-aged Korean individuals, of which included those residing in either South Korea or the United States. I was not in Korea to conduct the surveys and interviews myself; hence, the survey was created and distributed in an online format. This provided easier access to those outside of my immediate sphere of contact, as well as allowed surveyees to forward the survey to other eligible participants, subsequently increasing the sample size. To ensure proper conveyance of the meaning of each section, all instructions and questions were provided in English and Korean. Further, Korean questions were double-checked and approved by native Korean speakers who did not partake in the survey (nor were they eligible to).

The survey was divided into two parts: demographic questions and opinion questions.[3] Demographic questions were used to clarify participants' eligibility to participate in the study as well as possibly provide insight into new factors that could affect their responses (which could further be discussed in interviews). Underneath the umbrella of opinion questions, there are two subcategories: North Korea and Reunification. The North Korea section is extremely short, as it

[3] See Appendix A for the full list of questions in English and Korean.

only has one short answer and a second optional box for explanation. As for the Reunification section, which includes multiple choice, multi-select, and the occasional option for open-ended explanation. Finally, as mentioned above, surveyees had the choice to opt into a separate interview at the end of the survey. Because of the interview option, survey questions kept to the basics, so as to not cause survey fatigue.

Interview Design

To supplement the surveys, I further developed multiple questions to gather in-depth answers and reasonings behind participants' views on reunification. Since surveyees had the choice to opt into this interview at the end of the survey, I requested all the respondents who agreed to provide me with their name and times to choose when they would be available. Although every respondent did not reply, I was able to gather enough from the "yes" and "maybe" respondents to have a decent pool of interviewees with varying opinions and backgrounds. In total, there were six interviewees, three male and three female (all previous surveyees). Interviews were conducted both in person and via Zoom, as some respondents were unable to meet in person. All interviewees agreed to being recorded for research purposes.

Interviews were one-on-one and semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions under the following categories: reasoning for previous survey answers, the effects of family (parents and children) on reunification, military and conceptualizing North Korea (males only), the relationship between religion and reunification, how politics relate to reunification, and conceptualization of *Han Minjok* (this concept is explained later) and its relationship with reunification. Outside of these categories, I also asked random, open-ended questions based on

their answers. I made sure to let respondents say as much about their thoughts and experiences as possible; the interviews ebbed and flowed in accordance with interviewees' responses.

Overview of Demographics

Age and Sex

Since this research is specifically based on South Korean middle-aged individuals (*Giseong Sedae*), I provided the age ranges 40~49, 50~59, and 60~69 for participants to choose from.[4] In response to "How old are you? 귀하 귀하의 나이가 어떻게 되십니까?", 29% of respondents answered 40~49, 64.5% answered 50~59, and 6.5% responded 60~69 years old. Due to the nature of how I gathered respondents (snowball sample), many respondents had children in their 20s, which could help to explain the disproportionate number of 50~59 year-old respondents. In this research, there was a relatively even mix of male and female participants — 56.3% of participants are male whereas 43.8% are female. Inferring why this small disparity exists, it seems higher educated populations (i.e. males with a M.A. or Ph.D.) slightly skewed the male-female ratio.[5]

Country of Birth and Country of Residence

To the question, "What is your country of birth? 귀하의 출생 국가가 어떻게 되십니까?", 32 out of 32 respondents wrote "South Korea" in one way or another (examples of answers include: South Korea, ROK, 대한민국 *Daehan-minguk,*한국 *Hanguk).* As for

[4] These are inclusive age ranges.
[5] See Appendix B.1 & B.2

respondents' country of residence ("What is your country of residence? 귀하의 현재 거주하는 국가가 어떻게 되십니까?"), 25 respondents currently reside in South Korea, whereas 7 respondents' place of residence is in the United States.

Education and Occupation

Regarding education, there were eight individuals whose highest level of education was high school, twelve graduated from a four-year university, six indicated that they completed graduate school (up to Master's), and three provided that they had a Ph.D. As for the other three respondents, one specified that they had an M.D., another specified their Th.D. (Doctor of Theology), and the final individual left the answer blank.

As for respondents' occupations, I was able to divide the answers into five main categories: Education, Homecare, Business and Commerce, Religion, and Other. The majority of respondents were involved in Business and Commerce. Although there are five main categories, the list breakdown (see footnote) demonstrates the variety in occupational background among surveyees, reinforcing diversity of my respondents outside of their shared national identity.[6]

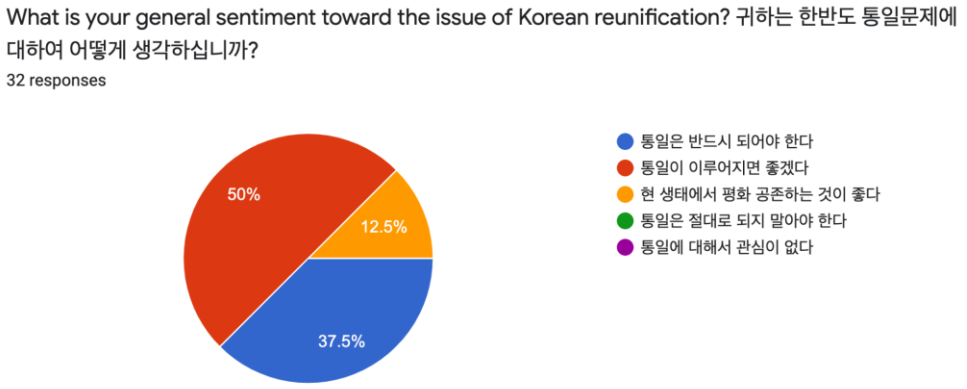
General Sentiments

Before taking a deeper look into the reasoning behind surveyees and interviewees' responses to reunification, it is important to examine the general sentiments of Korean reunification as provided in the survey.

First, survey respondents were asked to rate their sentiment toward Reunification on a spectrum of "Reunification absolutely must happen [통일은 반드시 되어야 한다]" (national

[6] See Appendix B.3

necessity), to “It is best to maintain peaceful coexistence as the status quo [현 상태에서 평화 공존하는 것이 좋다],” all the way to “I have no interest in reunification [통일에 대해서 관심이 없다].”



As seen in the chart above, 50% of respondents answered that they would like for reunification to take place. This is followed by 37.5% of respondents, who say reunification absolutely must happen, and 12.5%, who shared they simply want peaceful coexistence to be maintained. It is important to note that none of the 32 individuals surveyed indicated that reunification should never take place or that they have no interest in reunification for this question.

Regardless of their answer to the previous question, respondents were asked under which approach they would like to see reunification take place. This varied from “Peaceful conjoinence with no foreign influence [외국 영향없이 평화 통일],” to “ROK-led Absorbance Reunification [대한민국 주도 흡수 통일]” or “DPRK-led Absorbance Reunification [북한 주도 흡수 통일],” to “ROK and US-led Reunification [대한민국과 미국 주도 통일]” or “DPRK and China-lead

Reunification [북한과 중국 주도 통일],” and lastly “Do not want reunification [통일을 원하지 않음].” Before discussing the data derived from this question, here is an overview of these reunification scenarios:

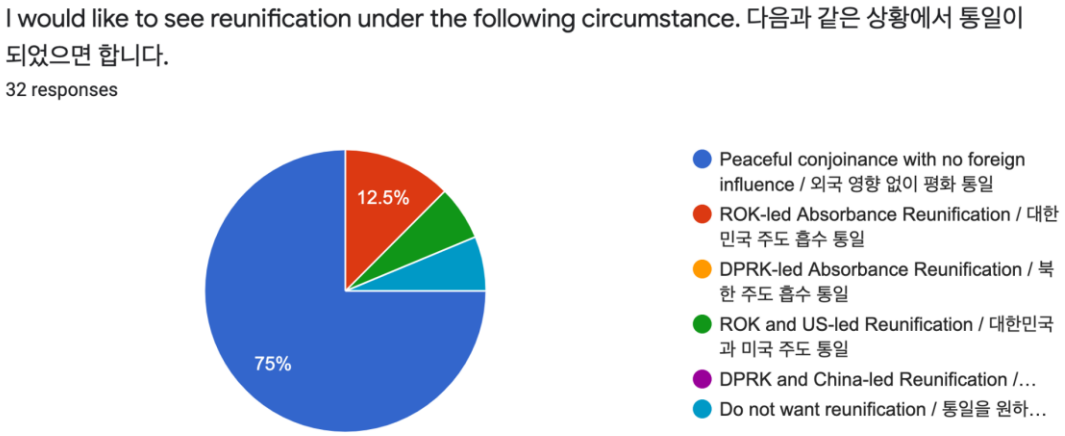
1. *Peaceful Conjoinance*

One scenario of reunification is a peaceful uniting of the nations (with or without foreign involvement, though without is optimal from both North and South Korea’s view). This could involve a number of combinations, including a confederation/two-systems-one-country structure or combining into a singular governmental body. The most important facet of this scenario is a peaceful coming together of the North and South and development of a joint decision, moving onto a united peninsula.

2. *Unification through Absorption*

The other scenario of reunification is that of unification through absorption. Absorption refers to the taking over of one nation by the other. This would involve a situation of collapse by one nation, leading to its absorption into the other, by military dispute leading to absorption, etc. There are four main options to consider: ROK-led reunification, DPRK-led reunification, ROK and US-led reunification, and DPRK and Chinese-led reunification. The main difference between the first two and second two is the absence or presence of foreign intervention — specifically by the two most involved foreign actors on the Korean peninsula, the United States and China.[7]

[7] Realistically, foreign actors would be involved in absorption, especially if military action was a part of the process. However, no respondents indicated military action in their responses. All answers seem to have been made with the assumption that military action was not a part of the equation.



An overwhelming majority of respondents — 75% — chose "Peaceful Conjoinance with No Foreign Influence" as their ideal reunification. This is followed by 12.5% of surveyees, who chose "ROK-led Absorbance Reunification." "ROK and US-led Reunification" and "Do Not Want Reunification" tied at 6.3% (which amounted to two respondents each).

No respondents chose "DPRK-led Reunification" or "DPRK and China-led Reunification." This was not surprising. When originally making the survey, I contemplated not putting these options in; I only kept them for the off chance that a respondent would want to provide this answer. In hindsight, leaving this option in was still the correct choice. The fact that no one chose either of these reunification scenarios provides us with more concrete evidence that the DPRK and China are not the ideal leaders of reunification to members of *Giseong Sedae*.

I was surprised by the sheer number of respondents who chose Peaceful Conjoinance as their ideal scenario. To better understand the motivations behind how respondents chose their answer, I inquired each interviewee about their answer to this question. One interviewee, who chose Peaceful Conjoinance, shared her reasoning behind this choice:

> "We are a sibling nation…Historically, foreign countries were the reason for the division between North and South Korea… in the past, Korea had no power [and was therefore easily influenced and controlled by other countries]. It

> should be unified slowly, little by little… among our own people[8] (우리 민족끼리 *Uri Minjok-kkiri*)…with no direct foreign intervention."

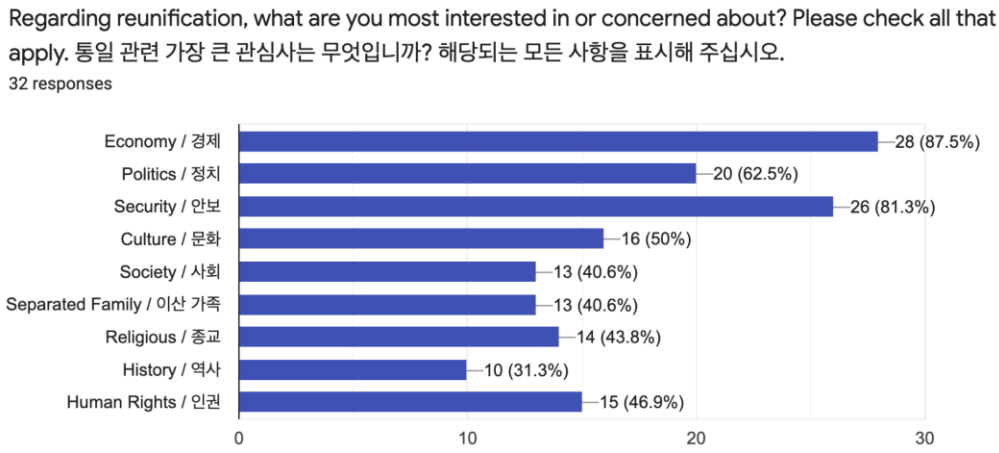
This was the general consensus of many respondents, including those who chose ROK-led Reunification. Even those who chose ROK- and US-led Reunification did not want the US to be significantly involved, but rather it played the role of a powerful nation acting as support, or back-up, for the South.

There is another peculiar facet of this data: the individuals who chose they did not want reunification. Where did these individuals stand on the previous question about their general sentiment to reunification? Both individuals chose that "they simply want peaceful coexistence to be maintained." Asking for further explanation, one interviewee shared:

> "We have been living as separate countries for a long time… trying to merge [the two now] would be especially chaotic and complicated… [instead of bringing peace, reunification would make things] very unpeaceful… politically, there would be way too many problems… [I think it would be best to just live peacefully and] treat the North as [just another] neighbor[ing country]."

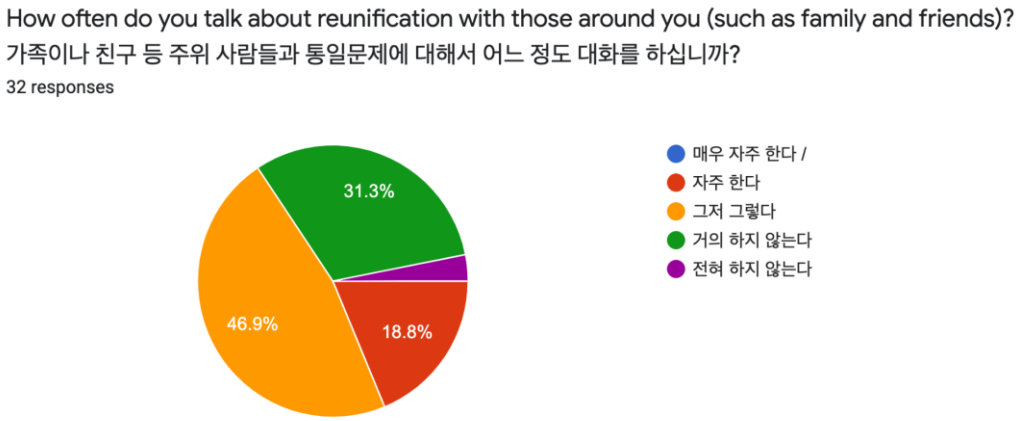
To gain better understanding about the specifics of respondents' concerns, the survey included the question, "Regarding reunification, what are you most interested in or concerned about?" Respondents were prompted to check all that apply, as well as provide any considerations not listed in an open short-answer blank.

[8] Translated as "our people" here to better convey the meaning of the sentence, but is normally translated as "our nation"' or "our race" elsewhere.

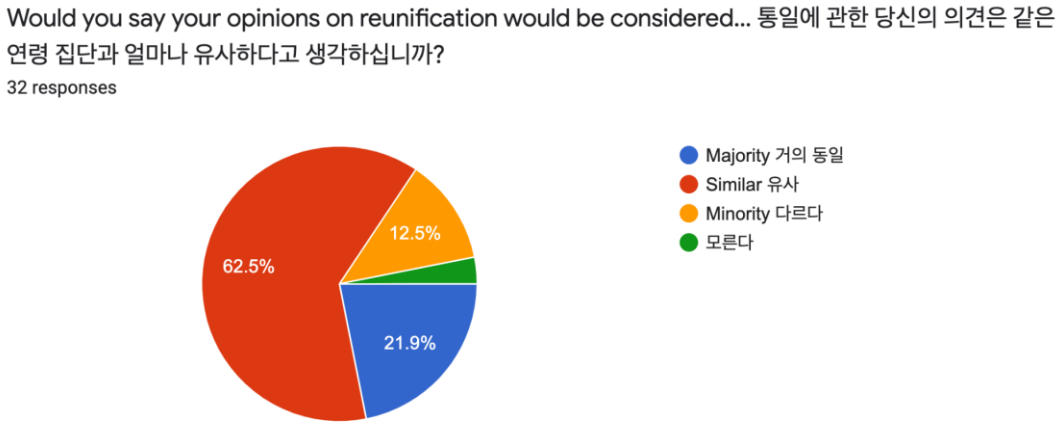


By far, the majority of respondents chose "Economy" as their greatest interest (or concern) regarding reunification. This concern is discussed later in this chapter, along with "Politics" and "Socio-cultural differences," both of which rank third, right after "Security." "Human rights" and "Religion" were selected by a little less than half of respondents, with "History" being the least important consideration in the eyes of respondents.

How often do *Giseong Sedae* discuss reunification with those around them? Well, according to this sample, the majority (46.9%) discuss the topic "Sometimes (그저 그렇다)," followed by 31.3% who discuss it "Almost Never (거의 하지 않는다)" and 18.8% who discuss reunification "Often (자주 한다)." Only one person said they never discuss reunification with those around them (전혀 하지 않는다).



The final question surveyees encountered was on perceived similarities between their personal views with their peers. As seen below, the majority of respondents viewed themselves as "Similar (유사)."



In an interesting turn of events, multiple individuals who marked "Minority" were not in the minority, and some individuals who marked "Majority" were not in the majority. During my interviews, I spoke with surveyees who were part of this phenomenon, and noticed a pattern. Those in the minority who thought they were in the majority's circle of friends have the same view of reunification as they do. For those in the majority who thought they were in the minority,

they generally did not seem to talk with their peers about reunification enough to know whether they were in the majority or minority.[9]

Limitations

As with all research, mine has its limitations and oversights. Within the survey, there were certainly further questions I wanted to ask that I was unable to, whether due to length of the survey or simply not thinking of the question until much later in the process. Examples of this are inquiring respondents' (and their parents') hometowns in order to investigate the connection between Korean regionalism and reunification attitudes, asking all respondents about military service (not just interview respondents), and getting percentages on religious affiliation from the survey population. For my interviews, there are a multitude of topics I could have delved into that I was unable to because of research or time limitations, such as respondents' perceptions of and interactions with North Korean refugees. Furthermore, among interview participants, there is a clear lack of variety, not only of opinion (not many respondents opposed reunification), but also religious affiliation (only one of six interviewees was not religious — the rest were Protestant Christians).[10] However, the responses I received to the questions I was able to ask within the time restraints were extremely valuable, rich in nuance and deep contemplation. For this, I am extremely grateful to all of my survey and interview participants who willingly shared emotional stories and personal information for the purpose of this research.

[9] Though I am unsure of why they automatically assumed that they were in the minority, I hypothesize that it is due to the pessimism that permeates discussions of reunification in the modern day; therefore, these individuals do not realize that their peers actually want reunification.

[10] I attempted to interview individuals with diverse views and backgrounds, but this was difficult as the survey was passed through multiple Christian groups, the majority of those who agreed to an interview were Christian, and I had to keep my interview sample small, as I had to conduct the interviews and qualitatively code them myself. Because of these limitations, I made sure to include at least one individual opposed to reunification and one who was not Christian.

CHAPTER 4: A NATION OF WOUNDS

REASONINGS FOR AND RESPONSES TO REUNIFICATION

"우리 나라에 많은 부분들이 상처의 역사죠.
The history of our nation is comprised of many wounds."
— Mr. B, Interviewee

When directly facing the issue of reunification, it is necessary to acknowledge the elephant in the room: reunification is an idealistic goal. There are many significant, seemingly impossible, barriers to reunification, particularly in the areas of politics, economy, and culture (discussed at length below). However, despite these concerns, future reunification of the divided Peninsula is an ever-present option that has never left the minds of Korean people since its division. Even amongst those against reunification, there is a unified underlying desire for peace on the Peninsula. In this chapter, I distinguish nuanced perspectives of *Giseong Sedae* and discuss their motivations for such perspectives through various lenses, of which include apprehensions to reunification, *Han Minjok* (the Nation), familial ties, political sentiments, and religiosity. These themes emerged organically out of survey and interview responses.

하지만… [*Hajiman*…]: Hesitancy Toward Reunification

"통일은 되어야한다고 생각합니다. 하지만…
Tongil-eun Dwaeoyahandago Saenggakhabnida. Hajiman…
I believe reunification must happen. However…"
— Surveyee

There is no shortage of blockades standing in the way of Korean reunification. The two Koreas have been separated for almost eighty years – twice the amount of time East and West Germany were separated before their reunification. Therefore, it is important to know what

hurdles must be overcome, as well as commonalities which might be used positively to mitigate the problems of reunification.

Examining each of the following differences, even in isolation, reunification is a daunting task. In both nations, reunification may cause social dissatisfaction and unrest, of which would be extremely detrimental for the North's totalitarian government. This leaves us with the more likely case of absorption reunification, in which one nation absorbs the other (likely due to the absorbed nation's political or economic system's failure). Though this scenario would most likely be the South absorbing the North, both scenarios would result in confusion and possibly conflict and retaliation from the populations being absorbed into the opposing foreign system. One surveyee inquires, "Unlike [the] South, North Korea demands regime stability, so it will be difficult to absorb [the North] even if we are reunified … Is inter-Korean reunification really the right choice in a situation where ideological and economic differences are unavoidable?"

Although both governments claim to want peaceful reunification of the Peninsula (such as those outlined in the 1972 Joint Communique), both states seem to lack real willpower to move forward seriously toward this joint goal (Jonnson, 2006, 227). To both the North and South, the easier choice for (momentary) peace and state stability is to maintain the status quo of a divided Peninsula rather than to pursue reunification. As Jonnson keenly observes, "The two Korean states are the main enemies to unification" (Jonnson, 2006, 228).

Political

As covered in the historical background section, the very reason the two Koreas split in 1945 was, simply put, due to US-Soviet political disputes at the beginning of the Cold War. These Cold War politics and political movements that took root in the North versus the South set the course for each country's political systems, whose modern results are outlined below.

The makeup of North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea 조선민주주의인민공화국 *Joseon Minjuju-ui Inmin Gonghwaguk*)'s political system is a dictatorship, single-party state, whose official state ideology is Kim Il-sung's own *Juche Sasang* (주체사상, national self-reliance). Although *Juche* was declared a distinct ideology by Kim Jong-il, it undoubtedly borrows from Marxism-Leninism, Confucianism, and Korean nationalism. *Juche* "aims to achieve national autonomy through the rule of a single leader [Kim regime], the maintenance of a strong military, and the pursuit of economic self-sufficiency" and asserts that "North Korea [itself]...must remain separate and distinct from the world, dependent solely on its own strength and the guidance of a near-godlike leader" (Oxford Dictionary, 2022; Beauchamp, 2018). The North is often characterized by its negative traits, such as its totalitarianism, lack of open political discourse, and human rights violations.

It is important to note the human rights violations North Korea is accused of by governing bodies and organizations around the world. According to the United Nations' Human Rights Watch, North Korea "remain[s] one of the most repressive countries in the world. Under the rule of Kim Jong Un, the third leader of the nearly 75-year Kim dynasty, the totalitarian government deepened repression and maintained fearful obedience using threats of execution, imprisonment, enforced disappearance, and forced labor. Due to the border closures and travel restrictions put in place to stop the spread of Covid-19, the country became more isolated than ever, with authorities intensifying already tight restrictions on communication with the outside world" (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This facet of the North Korean regime adds another difficult layer to the complex topic of political reunification.

Turning to the South, the Republic of Korea (대한민국 Daehan-minguk) is officially categorized as a unitary presidential republic; it is a constitutional democracy modeled loosely after the United States. Unlike its Northern neighbor, the South Korean political system is a multi-party system and holds open political discourse. South Korea has experienced multiple authoritarian regimes during its history (which was touched on in the background section), but through its democratic movement (민주화운동 *Minjuhwa Undong*), became a democratized state, with government restrictions loosening over time ever since.

The foundational differences between these two governing bodies cannot realistically be overcome through reunification alone. One interviewee states, “We have been separated for so long… If we attempted to reunify, it would not only be an intense shock to both nations, but would likely cause unrest. There would be too many political problems [to be resolved].” Other surveyees shared similar concerns, citing the differences in political systems to be a serious hesitancy to reunification. “Although Korea [has] had a long history [as one], [the] geopolitical situation around [the] Korean peninsula makes it [difficult] to happen.” Those who want peaceful reunification still share this hope, but with a few stipulations, one of them being a singular government founded on principles of freedom (resembling the South). “I think peaceful reunification based on liberal democracy and market economy will create an environment where freedom and human rights are guaranteed,” one surveyee said. Another shared, “It would be nice to gather the hearts of the people and not turn a blind eye to North Korea, but prepare well to show God's goodness and let our descendants enjoy a unified liberal democracy.”

Economic

One of the other most significant and commonly discussed factors that must ultimately be addressed in the case of reunification is the economic disparity that exists on the Korean peninsula. The two nations have completely different economic systems, with the North having a socialist, central planned economy, and the South having a mixed capitalist system. Their huge economic gap in the South's favor, "far exceed[ing] those between pre-unity Germany and Yemen" (Jonnson, 2006, 227). As of 2021, South Korea's nominal gross domestic product (GDP) is approximately 1.630 trillion USD; North Korea's GDP real GDP fell by 4.5% in 2020, and the latest numbers have the North's GDP at roughly 20 billion USD (Trading Economics, 2022; Jones, 2021). These numbers place South Korea's GDP at 80 times larger than its Northern counterpart! This translates to South Korea being ranked as the 10th largest GDP in the world, with North Korea at around 115th (Silver, 2022).

Considering the two nations, this is no surprise; South Korea is a significant economic player on the international stage. The nation not only is a major exporter of technology and machinery, but also has a stable international reputation due to its strong soft power presence, which has been solidified by hosting global events such as the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics and promoting Korean traditional and pop culture worldwide. North Korea, on the other hand, is extremely closed off from the rest of the world. This includes its economy. China is its main trading partner and resource of financial support (legally *and* illegally). Nuclear- and human rights-related sanctions keep the nation at arm's length from other economic powers; this certainly demonstrates where the North's priorities lie when it comes to regime and state preservation versus economic development.

As the South is economically superior to the North, reunification under both peaceful merging and absorption scenarios necessitate significant financial support from the South. This is

by far one of the greatest — if not the most important — considerations of the average Korean citizen — the financial burden of reunification. South Korean taxpayers expect that they would have to "foot the bill" to essentially rebuild North Korea. This is a very legitimate concern, as estimates place the cost of reunification between 1 and 3 trillion USD (Harding, 2018; Revesz, 2017). One surveyee stated, "Discussions on this issue [under the scenario of reunification] are expected to be urgently needed because of the wide gap in the level of economic [prosperity] between the two Koreas."

It should be noted that South Korea already supports the North economically in both direct and indirect ways. As of 2020, South Korea allocated approximately 680 billion won (roughly 550 million USD) for humanitarian aid to its Northern neighbor (Rich & Puhakka, 2020). Though I am unsure about the popularity of this view, South Korea's former ambassador to China, Chung Chong-Wook, suggests "improv[ing] relations sufficiently so that Seoul could begin pumping money into North Korea's crumbling infrastructure and industry" in an interview with *The Guardian* (Phillips, 2015). In his words, "The more we do before reunification actually arrives...the less expensive the reunification will be" (Phillips, 2015).

Aside from these inherently negative considerations, there are a few positive economic outcomes that are often brought up during discussions of Korean reunification. One of these is that of North Korea's natural resources being combined with South Korea's well-developed industrial system, which would cause Korea to become an economic powerhouse, propelling the nation to gain even greater regional significance — possibly replacing that of Japan (Kim, 1995, 27). The combined peninsula's land would make the newly unified Korea almost twice the size of the North or South by themselves — that is, the size of Utah compared to Mississippi or Minnesota. Successful economic merging and infrastructural rebuilding would also positively

impact issues both North and South Korea are facing in the modern day. Citizens in the North would have increased access to necessary services, more economic opportunities, and ultimately a greatly improved standard of living. Citizens in the South would have more cities to relocate to (which could help alleviate the current housing crisis) along with increased economic opportunities. Furthermore, a project that could come out of reunification is the "Korea-to-Europe" train route, as displayed in the map below.

Map of the Possible Train Route
Spanning from London, England to Busan, Korea (Daum Cafe, 2019)

The route starts on the Korean peninsula, enters China, stretches across Russia, and weaves throughout Europe. This would be an infrastructural feat, and would provide unprecedented opportunity for new land-based transnational flows, such as the popular South Korean dream of taking a train vacation from the Peninsula all the way to Europe. Multiple surveyees and interviewees expressed this desire: "[I can't wait to] travel abroad by land [if Korea reunifies]" and "[My family and I can] travel to Europe and other countries [if Korea reunifies]."

Ultimately, whether it is economic setbacks or benefits, reunification is likely to have significant economic repercussions for not only the Peninsula, but likely the entire world. The importance of this economic discussion is summarized in the following way by Youn-Suk Kim: "Political gesture and diplomatic compromise…between the South and the North can only go so

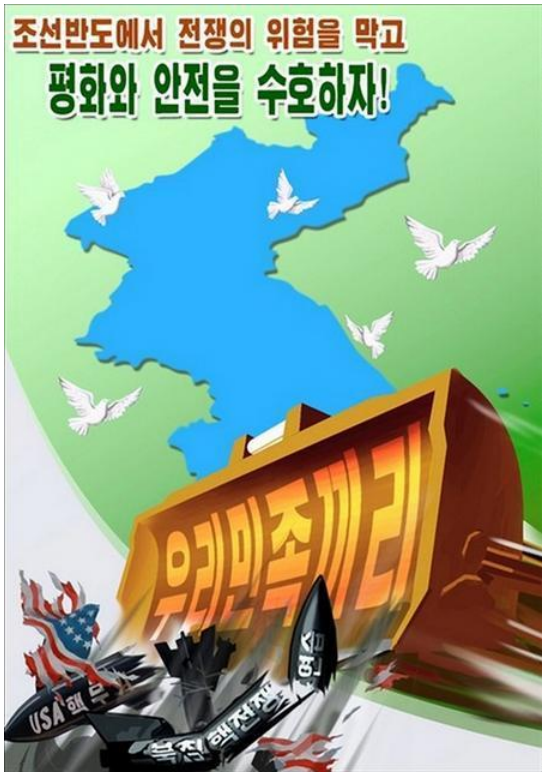
far, unless accompanied by economic cooperation. What makes a permanent, crucial ingredient of possible reunification might be economic benefits" (Kim, 1995, 34).

Socio-Cultural

The socio-cultural realm is yet another important facet of the reunification equation. The North and South are not only made up of *Han Minjok* (one nation, one race, one people), but also have a shared history of a unified Korea spanning multiple centuries (668AD-1945) (Jonnson, 2006, 227). There are also numerous cultural similarities between the two nations, as they share the same foundational Korean culture. However, the almost eighty-year span of separation has created modern-day socio-cultural disparities that would be difficult to overcome. Since the two Koreas' split, two separate cultures have branched from the centuries-old, formerly singular Korean culture. These cultures have been influenced by two extremely different economic and political systems, causing the branches to stretch further apart with time. Social norms, common interests and life experiences, standards of living, and even language — though varying in their degrees — are undeniably divergent between the North and South.

(In)famous Photograph Showing the Korean Peninsula at Night (Stone, 2014)

One basic example of the socio-cultural differences between the North and South is their perspective interactions with the rest of the world. As mentioned in the section on economy, South Korea has a solid reputation of soft power that has left its mark on the world and even contributes to it, particularly within the past decade. Its capital, Seoul, is an international city where Korean citizens and foreigners alike intermingle, information and technology are freely exchanged, and international economic transactions take place. Compare this to the North, where international travel is restricted even to the upper echelons of society, any significant foreign presence is unwanted and unwelcome, information and economic exchange are highly restricted, and technological advancements lag far behind its Southern neighbor.



North Korea Reunification Propaganda Poster (The Hankyoreh, 2016)[11]

[11] Top-to-Bottom Translation:
"From the Korean Peninsula, let us stop the danger of war
And protect [its] peace and safety!"
(Depicted on the Bulldozer) "With Our Race (*Uri Minjok-kkiri*)"
(Depicted on the Nuclear Warheads) "USA Nuclear Weapons"; "North Korean Nuclear War Practice"

As Jonnson observes, “Socio-political [differences] undermine the [two Koreas’] joint historical legacy” (2006, 227). Both Jonnson and Grinker observe that, rather than being culturally homogenous, the North and South are actually heterogeneous; Grinker claims that the Koreas have not worked through their own issues of the past (i.e. Korean War and systemic differences) to be able to properly work through the challenges of a heterogeneous reunified Korea (Grinker, 1998, 258). Johnson suggests that the Koreas’ heterogeneity should not be exaggerated, but rather accepted as a natural result of the “division of a socialist North Korea and capitalist South Korea” (Jonnson, 2006, 226). Furthermore, the homogenous aspects of the two can be used as a starting point for “creating a socio-cultural community” (Jonnson, 2006, 226). However, this sort of community “cannot be equalized with a restoration of homogeneity” (Jonnson, 2006, 226).

Applying these observations to the individual perspective, North Korean refugees, young and old, experience immense difficulties acclimating to South Korea, especially in a cultural sense. A specific example of this can be observed in primary and secondary school, where North Korean refugee children are bullied because of their height, accent, and different features or physical appearance, which is often “the product of years of malnutrition and irregular eating” (Ryang, 2012, 15). Aside from physical differences, significant cultural differences exist as well (Chung, 2008). A South Korean friend of mine described their own experience growing up around North Korean refugees:

> “[North Korean children that I knew] couldn’t adapt well; they were bullied in school because their accent and even appearance is a little different. They had difficulty adapting to South Korean culture and [trying to become like just] another South Korean [citizen]. Even the way they talk and the way they think is different from us. Even our behaviors are different, so we can feel it [plain as day]. At a young age, North Korean refugee children can feel the

> discrimination. From a non-Korean perspective, there [may not seem to be] many differences [between North and South Koreans], but for Koreans, [we can clearly see there] are *many* differences…In fact, there are quite a few North Korean defectors who commit suicide [because] they can't acclimate to South Korean society."

These experiences of North Korean refugees in modern-day South Korea foreshadow the problems of socio-cultural adjustment that are likely to arise if the two Koreas were to reunify. This reinforces the necessity of finding ways to properly mitigate inter-Korean cultural shocks.

I recall a discussion a few years ago I had with a South Korean individual who visited North Korea on a business trip. Recounting numerous odd experiences from their time there, they concluded their time in the North was even more eye-opening than they expected. "I realized while there, that although we are the same people [*Gateun-minjok*], our cultures are extremely different…My main takeaway from my short time visiting North Korea is, not that reunification won't happen, but it will take nothing short of a miracle from God for us to reunify."

Numerous survey and interview participants discussed the ways reunification is an undeniably daunting task. However, respondents who expressed concerns about political, economic, and socio-cultural differences still hold on to a vision for change. Of course, the status quo, which is to not reunify, does not pose severe problems for South Korea — politically, it poses a threat of national security, but economically and culturally, the South does not really suffer from the current division. However, the internalized nationalist idea of *Han Minjok* (one people) as essential to the nation-state makes this status quo inadequate for members of *Giseong Sedae*.

The Rabbit is *Han Minjok*: The Tenacity of the Nation in Justifying Reunification

> "'역사적으로 토끼모양은 한민족이다, 중국과 일본 다 지배하려고 했는데 우리 아직 살아남았다'… 이렇게 교육을 받아왔어요.
>
> *'Historically, everyone within the shape of the rabbit is* Han Minjok*. China and Japan tried to take us over, but we [*Han Minjok*] still survived.'... This is what we learned in school."*
>
> — Mr. C, Interviewee

In the context of reunification, the concept of *Minjok*, specifically *Han Minjok*, cannot be ignored. *Minjok* can be translated in English as "nation," "race," "people," "ethnic-group," and even "race-nation." The Korean national identity is based on the peninsula's ethnic homogeneity, both in the North and the South (Seow, 2013, 4). When asking the question, "Who is included in *Han Minjok*?" I received the same answer, regardless of age, sex, or hometown: "Anyone with Korean blood(line) (조선 혈통 *Joseon hyeoltong* or 한국혈통 *Hanguk hyeoltong*)."[12] *Han Minjok* is a phrase not only used as a self designation among North Koreans or South Koreans, but stretches beyond the confines of "North" and "South" to include all ethnic Koreans, even around the world.

I have noticed this particular word choice often used in the context of reunification to justify why reunification must take place. For example, "We are one race (같은 민족 *Gateun Minjok*/한민족 *Han Minjok*), so we have to reunify someday/there is no way we won't reunify someday." This is no different in the North; North Korean reunification propaganda posters

[12] Actually, there was some disparity in how people defined "Korean blood(line)," as some individuals included Half-Koreans and some did not.

frequently make use of the phrase "*Uri Minjok-kkiri* (우리 민족끼리)," meaning "With Our Race (*Minjok*)." The strength of *Minjok* holds the two Koreas together in a transcendent bond that inherently drives them toward reunification.

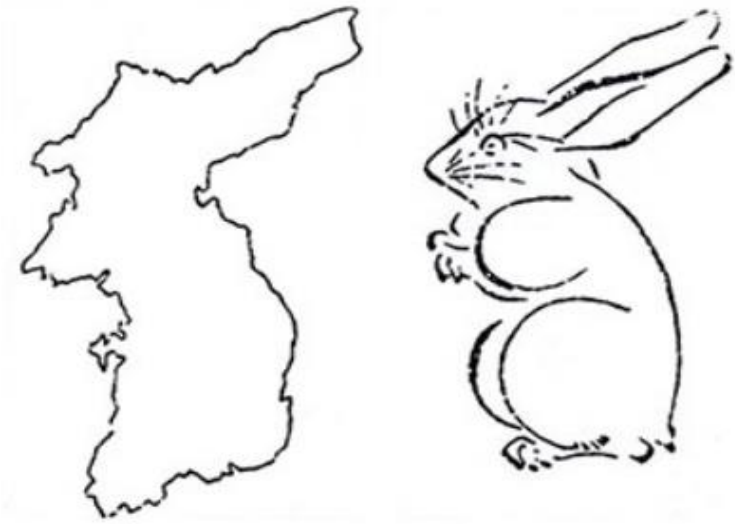
North Korea Reunification Propaganda Poster (The Hankyoreh, 2016)[13]

In research conducted by professor Lee Nae-young at Korea University, "The stronger [a South Korean citizen's] national identity (민족적 정체성 *Minjok-jeok Jungchaesong*) is connected with the North and [share an] emotional bond … with North Korea, the stronger the recognition of the necessity of unification" (Lee, N., 2014, 195). Further, "it can be expected that the stronger the feeling of a national bond (민족적 정체성 *Minjok-jeok Jungchaesong*) with North Korea, the stronger the need for unification and an active attitude toward unification" (Lee, N., 2014, 179).

[13] Top-to-Bottom Translation:
"With Our Race (*Uri Minjok-kkiri*);
North and South, [Living] Abroad[,] all Koreans (*Joseon Minjok*) under the banner of *Uri Minjok-kkiri;*
On this land, let's build a unified power/strong country (*Tongil Gangguk*) with heightened dignity and prosperity!"

In both surveys and interviews, people frequently brought up the idea of *Minjok* and bloodline as justification for the necessity of Korean reunification, even before receiving a question about it. "한민족이니까… (Because we are *Han Minjok*)", "한핏줄이니까… (Because we are *Han Pitjul*, one bloodline)" were frequent answers justifying why respondents believe the Koreas should reunify, as well as reasons why other nations should stay out of the reunification process. "[Although] we are separated into two systems, [Communist and Democratic],… historically speaking, the Korean people are *Han Minjok,* we are *Han Pitjul* (one bloodline)... Because we are *Han Minjok,* [I would like for us to] without foreign influence, of our own volition, to live together, to reunify."

There was also the aspect of *Han Minjok* education, as demonstrated in the epigraph to this section: "'Historically, everyone within the shape of the rabbit is *Han Minjok*. China and Japan tried to take us over, but we [*Han Minjok*] still survived.'... This is what we learned in school." Another interviewee stated: "I always thought we were *Han Minjok* since I was young. Significant [socio-cultural] meaning was placed on *Han Minjok* during that time."[14]



[14] This emphasis on *Han Minjok* has only waned in recent years, with the rise of *Damunhwa Gajok*, or multicultural families (Chang, 2015).

Map of the Korean Peninsula Compared with the Shape of a Rabbit (Noo-So, 2019)

When asked, "Do you consider North Koreans as part of '*Han Minjok* (One People)'?", all interviewees quickly replied "yes." One respondent shared this view of *Han Minjok*: "Before [*Han Minjok*] was established in modern-day Korea, it was in the Joseon Dynasty, Goguryeo, [all the way to the] beginning of Korean history, [the idea of *Han Minjok*] has been passed down [ever since]... if the Koreas hadn't been separated, we would be living well [as *Han Minjok*], no?" However, even with resounding "yes-es," interviewees further expressed concern over the differences between the North and South. There is a noticeable dichotomy between the remaining similarities yet striking differences between the two cultures, as demonstrated in one interviewee's answer:

> "North Korean people speak the same language, right? And [we] have the same culture. When I sometimes watch their television and…how they live, things like that, it reminds me of South Korea in the 1960s or 1970s…so, I feel that I'm always kind of connected to them because we have so much in common. [Yet,] somehow [North Koreans] are different, even though [we have the] same language and culture and everything, but they are under [the Kim] regime, [the North is] also [a] Communist country, so definitely there are some differences, but I still feel like I'm kind of connected to them."
>
> — *Mr. A, Interviewee*

Alternatively, one interviewee expressed her change in opinion of *Han Minjok* in relation to North Koreans from positive to negative:

> "I always thought we were *Han Minjok* since I was young…[however,] as I got older and researched more on my own, my opinion changed…[although] we need to be interested in what is happening [in the North] because we are *Han Minjok*, [but we have various differences,] such as different language, so I feel a bit of wariness now [in regard to North Korea and use of *Han Minjok*]."
>
> — *Mrs. D, Interviewee*

As seen through these responses, the notion of *Han Minjok* permeates *Giseong Sedae*'s psyche so deeply that it transcends temporal and physical bounds, tying them together with people they have never even met.

> "Originally, I thought it was unfortunate that [North and South Koreans] are one people [and viewed this connection as a burden]. However, once I met Jesus, I gained sympathy for North Koreans… [I came to strongly view us as *Han Minjok*;] we (North and South Koreans) are the same. Now, my dream is to volunteer as a teacher [in North Korea] when we are reunified."
>
> —*Mrs. C, Interviewee*

Of course, the bonds of *Han Minjok* are based on personal connection and bloodline. Therefore, the closer personal ties someone holds to the War and North Korea, the greater collective familial sentiment of *Han Minjok* is amplified.

Eating Frogs: Familial Ties to North Korea and Korean Division

> *"My father's birthday is June 25th, 1940, so the Korean War broke out the morning of his tenth birthday. He experienced many things like escaping from the Capitol City [Seoul]…to a relative's place far away [as well as] extreme hunger… There wasn't much food there… One thing [I remember him telling me] is that [he was so hungry] he ate frogs… [No wonder] while he raised me, he was strict about food."*
>
> — Mrs. A, Interviewee

The rate of civilian casualties in the Korean War — 10% of Korea's prewar population — is higher than that of World War II and the Vietnam War, two of the most brutal, widespread wars in modern history (History.com Editors, 2009). Before the war broke out, it is estimated that there were about 800,000 men who defected from the North to the South; during the war, the number of (men) defectors was about 600,000 (NamuWiki [d], 2022).

In my survey, only five out of thirty-two participants (roughly 16%[15]) shared that they had family members who either directly fought in the Korean War (참전용사 *Chamjeon Yongsa*) or who fled from North Korea to the South (실향민 *Shilhyangmin*). This came as a surprise to me, as I thought there would be more individuals with male family members, such as parents or grandparents, who had fought in the Korean War. In order to dig deeper, I decided to broaden the question to include "any family who directly experienced the division of Korea." In doing so, I was able to receive more detailed answers about family ties to Korean division.

Almost every individual interviewed had connections to the war in one way or another. Two individuals had family who fought in the war (indicated in the survey as well), two had family who had fled North Korea, and all except one had family who had experienced the Korean War in one way or another, whether it be one's father who experienced starvation, family who had to flee their hometown, or grandmothers widowed from the loss of their husbands during the war. The main reason more individuals did not share this information is because of the way the questions were originally phrased in the survey, as well as the fact that many of the respondents' fathers or grandfathers were either just above or below drafting age.

One of the most frequently mentioned groups in regard to family ties to division was that of divided families (이산가족 *Isan Gajok*). A respondent expressed his own familial grief:

> "It is a pity that Korea has been divided for over 70 years. [This fact is] especially painful to me when I think of the separated families (이산가족 *Isan Gajok*). My uncle (큰아버지 *Keun Aboji*, father's older brother) was separated from his family, but he died [before being able to reunite with them]. I think Korea must reunify, even if just for the sake of the remaining separated families."

[15] Specifically, 15.62%.

— *Surveyee*

This sentiment is not exclusive to those with separated families in their own lineage. Other respondents shared their feelings of sorrow and regret about the separation of these families. Certainly, the effects of the previously mentioned TV program *Finding Separated Families* (이산가족을 찾습니다 *Isan Gajok-eul Chatseumnida)* is not lost here; this program was consistently brought up during discussions on separated families. *Finding Separated Families* created a collective memory that has even affected the sentiments of those who do not want reunification:

> "[When I was a child,] whenever they showed *Finding Separated Families,* I cried a lot.... [All TV programs besides that] didn't broadcast, and everyone only watched *Finding Separated Families*. It had extremely high television ratings. Everyone watched it… When watching [the program], [there is a certain connection] that [viewers] shared and [caused me and my peers to feel that] we (North and South Korea) need to reunify quickly [for the sake of these families]. [It made me think,] these families need to meet sometime, why aren't they allowed to meet? I think those [feelings], the sympathy I felt, were really influential.
>
> "The show broadcasted again not too long ago, around 2015, 2016? They broadcast again about every 10 years… [I'm not completely against interaction between the two Koreas, but] the systems are just too different [to reunify]… [I would like something that would connect the two countries, just not becoming the same country. Under such a system,] I hope that [the separated families] can meet."
>
> — *Mrs. D, Interviewee*

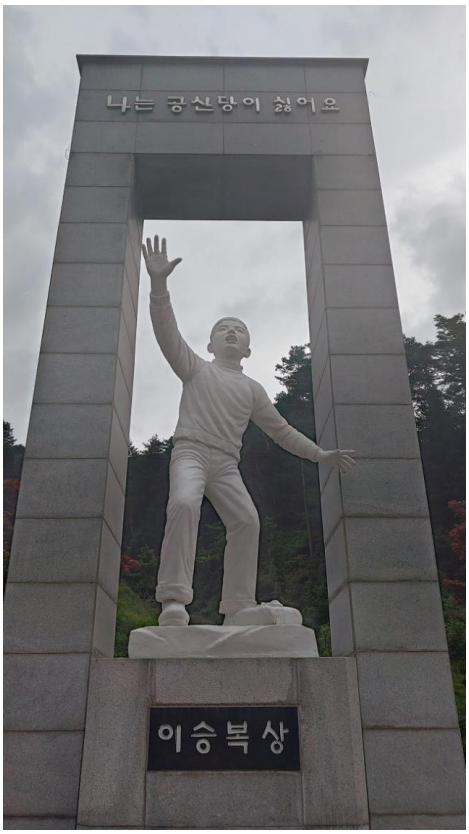
Certainly, the notion of *Han Minjok* and familial connections cause members of *Giseong Sedae* to feel personal connection to those in North Korea that transcend temporal and physical bounds. This section brings about a new consideration: can these ties truly overcome the hesitance instilled in *Giseong Sedae* through anti-communist — and ultimately anti-North Korean — education from a young age?

"나는 공산당이 싫어요" [*Na-neun Gongsandangi Shiro-yo*, I Hate Communists]:

A Generation Raised with 빨갱이 공포 (*Ppalgaengi Gongpo*, Red Scare)

> *"[Why did I choose ROK- and US-led reunification?] Well, I don't want [a unified Korea] to be communist. I am scared about that."*
>
> — Mrs. A, Interviewee

On October 19, 1968, members of the DPRK's Korean People's Army moved into the South on a mission to establish guerilla bases in the South's Taebaek Mountain Range. Two months later, on December 9, several of these North Korean soldiers barged into Lee's house, demanding the Lee family provide them with food and shelter (NamuWiki [e], 2022). They asked the son, Lee Seung-bok, if he liked North or South Korea better, to which he replied the South. The soldiers began to beat him, until he said in defiance "나는 공산당이 싫어요 *Na-neun Gongsandang-i sireoyo* [I hate Communists]." This further enraged the soldiers, and they ultimately killed him, his mother, younger brother, and younger sister.



Statue of Lee Seung-bok [이승복상 Lee Seung-bok Sang*]* (Pressian, 2021)

One of the interviewees recounted this tale to me when describing moments in her life that impacted how she views Korean division and reunification. “I visited the *Lee Seung-bok Eorin-i* [이승복 어린이, Child Lee Seung-bok]’s house…when I was like ten or eleven [years old]... [This visit and the story of Lee Seung-bok greatly] affected me [by causing me to develop] hatred [toward] North Korea, and communists too.”

She continued, recounting another formative memory:

> “When I was young, it’s very funny, there [was a] cartoon named ‘똘이장군 [General Ddoli],’ it is a really fun story… I [had] a tape [of the movie], and [with that tape] I listened to the story over and over… [in the movie,] there [are] some songs, [and] I [would even sing along with those] song[s].” “[The story takes place with a group of people in a village who] are suffer[ing] from North Korea, but General Ddoli stood up and…like a savior, rescue[d] the

people suffering from North Korea." "In the last part — you know who Kim Il-sung [is]? — Kim Il-sung[, who in the movie was depicted as an evil anthropomorphic pig,] just suddenly turned into [a] baby pig [and ran away]… then the story is over! So, I grew up with [these sorts of] messages… [and was greatly] influence[d by] that kind of [anti-North Korean] education."

Poster for General Ddoli [뚤이장군 Ddoli Janggun*]* (Oh My News, 2009)

Other survey and interview respondents also brought up this anti-communist, anti-North Korean education and propoganda they experienced growing up. This included mandatory military service for Korean men. Many mentioned such education in a negative light, such as this interview participant:

"My parents' generation went to the Korean war, so they hated communists…[there is a strong] conservative idea that communists are evil and we can't trust them. For [my parents' generation], though they have sympathy for North Koreans, they hate communism…[I had similar experiences in the military. What is taught in] military [service] is kind of like brainwashing…They brainwash everything, want you to believe what they believe…we are trained that all communists are bad [because] they are our enemies. After I [finished] military

> service and became a citizen again, I developed a more objective view on North Korean people."
>
> — *Mr. A, Interviewee*

Reunification is an issue with numerous political aspects to it; therefore, political affiliation cannot be ignored when examining variables that affect views on reunification. In 2021, Gallup reported that almost half of South Korea identifies as moderate (49%), with 28 percent identifying as conservative (21% leaning [약간 *Yakkan*] and 6% very [매우 *Maewoo*]) and 23 percent identifying as liberal (18% leaning [약간 *Yakkan*] and 5% very [매우 *Maewoo*]) (Gallup Korea [a], 2021).[16] Examining how political affiliation affects views on reunification, Professor Lee Nae-young at Korea University observes in his research: "the people who had a progressive ideological orientation or supported a progressive party felt a need for unification more than the people who had conservative ideological tendencies and supported a conservative party" (Lee, N., 2014, 175). This is reaffirmed by Seoul National University's data from their Institute for Peace and Unification Studies' "2021 Unification Awareness Survey" (SNU, 2021, p. 15).[17]

How do the current *Giseong Sedae* view this connection? All of my respondents either stated they were in the middle (not conservative or liberal), did not like politics, or avoided discussing their personal views at all. There was a consistent theme of "liberal-for-reunification" versus "conservative-against-reunification." "[Definitely,] more liberal [people] want reunification more than conservatives," one respondent shared. "[Just look at the Moon Administration, they] have [certain] social ideas [that contribute to them being] open and friendly to North Korea." This individual didn't share what these ideas were, but it can be inferred that these ideas are focused on diplomatic dialogue and maintaining peace. Interestingly

[16] See Appendix C.1
[17] See Appendix C.2

enough, another respondent, who knows and works with North Korean refugees, was greatly displeased with the current Moon administration:

> "[The Moon administration] is basically recognizing the Kim Jong-un regime [as legitimate]… [His administration] is making [refugees] into traitors and removing the ability of North Korean refugees to do anything with confidence or pride… He gives them worse shock in the South [than they experienced in the North]…[His administration] touts their concern for human rights, [but in reality] Moon Jae In is the worst when it comes to [helping] North Korean refugees."
>
> — *Mrs. C, Interviewee*

As seen in the section above, there is a strong connection between anti-communism and the way modern *Giseong Sedae* conceptualize reunification. Some respondents brought this point into the political sphere. One interviewee shares her experience with this connection while reflecting on her upbringing:

> "In my hometown, about 80% of people are conservative. [For example,] if you turned on the TV station MBC, 50% of people would think 'you've turned on the communist station!' I'm sure I thought the same thing when I was young. Conservatives are [less likely to want] reunification [because of the connection between communism and North Korea].
>
> "The process of reunification will be confusing, [especially in the political sphere]… [We] would have to accept all [parts of North Korean] culture [and way of life]; I [can't say] I'm confident [South Korea] could [be so accepting and] overcome [these differences]."
>
> — *Mrs. D, Interviewee*

Even with the significance of anti-communist education and the affects it has had in the political sphere, none of the respondents shared negative sentiment toward North Korean people themselves. Rather, they voiced the opposite: feelings of empathy, regret, sorrow, and often, the desire to help. How did these individuals develop a more balanced view of North Korean people? One answer to this that I consistently noticed was that of Christianity. This leads us to the following section on Christianity and reunification. Below is part of a surveyee's response, who contrasted her anti-communist upbringing with her Christian faith.

> "After the division, [we] were educated to resist communism, so I didn't think about unification. But, as a person — and a people — who believes in God, we should look at our churches that live without keeping God's Word or love our neighbors, [and use this as motivation to] pray and model [God's love] with actions."
>
> — *Surveyee*

The Two Great Commandments: Christianity and Reunification[18]

"I have been praying that God opens the door for South Korea [to begin the process of reunification]."

— Mr. A, Interviewee

"So much prayer has gone into Korean reunification, there is no way it won't happen."

— Mrs. E, Anonymous

South Korea has a considerably large religious population compared to other East Asian nations. Although 60 percent of South Korea's population is non-religious, 23 percent of the population is Christian (Protestant 17%, Catholic 6%), along with 16 percent being Buddhist (Gallup Korea [b], 2021).[19,20] As for age breakdowns, those in their 40s reported as 68 percent non-religious, 21 percent Christian (15% Protestant and 6% Catholic), and 11 percent Buddhist; those in their 50s reported as 57 percent non-religious, 23 percent Buddhist, and 20 percent Christian (14% Protestant and 6% Catholic). Those 60 and older reported as 41 percent non-

[18] Referring to *Matthew 22:36-40*
[36] "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" [37] Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' [38] This is the first and great commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' [40] On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
[19] See Appendix C.3
[20] As for other religions, they make up extremely small numbers, ranging from 0 to 1 percent. Buddhist, Confucianist, and possibly some Hinduist traditions have also mixed over time with ancient Korean shamanistic practices that were prevalent throughout Korean history.

religious, 31 percent Christian (23% Protestant 8% Catholic), and 28 percent Buddhist (Gallup Korea [b], 2021).[21]

This is an interesting contrast to those within their 20s and 30s. Those in their 20s are the least religious, with 78 percent reporting as nonreligious, 17 percent as Christian (14% Protestant, 3% Catholic), and 4 percent Buddhist. Those in their 30s reported as 70 percent nonreligious, 24 percent Christian (19% Protestant, 5% Catholic), and 6 percent Buddhist (Gallup Korea [b], 2021).[22] As we can infer from these numbers, religiosity is much higher overall amongst middle-aged and elderly Koreans.[23]

Religion, particularly Christianity, was heavily involved in South Korean freedom and democracy movements, and religious leaders and groups have spearheaded conversations of improving inter-Korean relations, fostering peace on the peninsula, and reuniting the divided *Han Minjok* (Kang, 1995, 124-131). Religious individuals and organizations (once again, many Christian) also take great interest in advocating for freedom for North Korean citizens (Zadeh-Cummings, 2017).[24] According to a survey from 2011, "68.8% of South Korean religious believers said that unification between South and North Korea is needed (this statistic is considered relatively high considering the fact that only the 53.7% of the non-religious believers said that the unification is needed.)" (Yi, 2013, 305). Therefore, positive religiosity seems to statistically maintain a strong connection with pro-reunification sentiments. This is certainly substantiated by not only many interview participants (who I asked specifically about the topic), but also by multiple survey respondents.

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[21] See Appendix C.3
[22] See Appendix C.3
[23] It is important to note, the younger population (*MZ Sedae*) is both less religious *and* less inclined to support reunification.
[24] Although there are no official percentages on how many North Korea-focused NGOs are faith-based, there is no shortage of religious groups that appear when searching for these organizations.

"What is the point of being a Christian?" I was asked this rhetorical question by multiple interviewees as they explained their reasoning behind why they supported reunification. The answer that came after was relatively similar for multiple respondents: "[One of] Christians' responsibilit[ies is to] take care of the underprivileged… [Therefore,] we need to help North Koreans [through the process of reunification]."

When discussing religion with interviewees, I began with a general assessment: are you religious? If so, what religion? If an interviewee was not religious (which only ended up being one individual), I would prompt them to share their thoughts on the religion as a whole, along with their ideas on the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in reunification. The one non-Christian individual shared this sentiment:

> "Whether it's Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, each religion has its thoughts about reunification… [I think let] Buddhism keep in the way of Buddhism, Christianity keep in the way of Christianity, politics keep in the way of politics, [these shouldn't be too mixed] within reunification…[they should be mixed] to the extent of] people from the North have religious beliefs too, [so the North and South believers can come together and religion be a part of reunification in that sense]...[To reunify, we should keep focus on the fact that] we are *Han Minjok,* and we should [be able to] live a good[, peaceful] life together."
>
> — *Mr. C, Interviewee*

Besides this, Mr. C did not provide much other comment on the idea of religion and reunification.

Moving back to the other respondents, all of them are Christian, with two being pastors; each individual had a lot to say about reunification. To the same question on the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in reunification, I received a variety of answers. One participant who frequently works with North Korean refugees shared her thoughts:

> "[I view Christianity taking part in reunification] in a positive light. Christianity really came from Pyongyang to the South. [Before Korea's division,

> those in northern Korea] had much stronger faith and belief. [In turn, those who fled the North during the War] brought this [strong faith] to the South. Of course, there is an underground church in North Korea now, [and] missionaries who help those people [by] going to North Korea and secretly spreading the Gospel. There are also many people who [start] businesses [in North Korea] with God's love.
>
> "As the Gospel spreads, the people whose minds are trapped [and hindered by the North Korean regime] are then awakened [to the truth]. [This is a big reason why] the North Korean regime controls Christianity so much. The Gospel can't be stopped! The North Korean government becomes nervous as [the Gospel] enters the North. Christian influences change people's minds and [bring them to] defect from North Korea. I think the Gospel that has been sown by Christianity for 70 years is at work.
>
> "North Korea gets a lot of help from Christian organizations… [If reunification happens, I think Christians will help a lot.] For example, hospitals… and universities can be established… much of this work begins with religious groups; [we can help do] the things that the government cannot or is slow to do."
>
> — *Mrs. C, Interviewee*

Although most other Christian respondents shared the same sentiments, one respondent — a pastor — had a slightly nuanced response: "Personally, [I don't think] Christianity would help much with reunification. [It would help some, but mostly] just a little… We have to reunify through conversation and discussion. At this moment in time, reunification is not possible. The people who have experienced the Korean War must leave influential positions in society [for us to have these conversations]. Reunification is impossible without dialogue." When prompted to elaborate on his comment about the generation who experienced the war, this pastor shared:

> "The reason why it doesn't help is, before the Korean War, Pyongyang [and northern korea in general] had a much larger Christian population. Many Christians from North Korea fled to the South because of the Communist Party['s oppression]…A lot of [Christian] roots in South Korea [began with seeds of the Gospel planted by these North Korean Christians]. [They are] Christians with [deep] wounds[, and this hurt has been transferred to modern-day Christianity in South Korea]. When you have a lot of hate, you need time [to pass and new] generations who don't know the pain of [the Korean] War."
>
> — *Mr. B, Interviewee*

As seen in these responses, there is a significant connection between not only empathy for North Koreans, but viewing the two Koreas as family that must be reconciled. As Dr. Wi Jo Kang points out in his essay on Christianity and Korean reunification, "The essential meaning of Peace in the New Testament is to bind the brokenness, to unite the separated entities and to reconcile one to another. Christ…went so far as to say that neighbors who continued to be hostile to one another would not expect to be reconciled to God" (Kang, 1995, 124).[25, 26] The desire for reunification among these respondents of faith is not a mere wish; it is a religious command that necessitates action. Multiple interviewees shared their belief that modern-day Christians must be prepared to do something when God "opens the door" for reunification.

> "We pray, but sometimes God wants us to [actually] do something, so the belief [combines] three things together: knowledge, spiritual [faith], and willingness to do something. God may open the door not only to pray, but also to [take action]."
>
> — *Mrs. A, Interviewee*

> "God has His timing. When we [Christians] want [reunification] with desperation, God will bring it to pass. Are we really desperate [for reunification]? Christians must pray with great earnestness, with great despair [for the division]…I think God will hear that and make it come to pass. …We Christians must be earnest and desperate [for reunification;] you become desperate, you can change everything…Reunification is God's work."
>
> —*Mrs. C, Interviewee*

[25] Kang refers to the New Testament word "peace," which is "EIRENE," which "deriv[es] its verb form 'binding' and 'uniting,' the divisions or separated ones" (1995, 124).

[26] Kang goes on to quote Matthew 5:21-24, which ends with the following: "[v.23] So when you are offering your gift to the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; [v.24] first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (1995, 124).

CHAPTER 5: CODA

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"조금씩 조금씩 맞춰서 통일되어야 합니다.
Reunification needs to happen step-by-step."

— Mrs. C, Interviewee

조금씩, 조금씩 [*Jjogeum-ssik, Jjogeum-ssik*]: Natural Reunification

The majority of those surveyed have a shared wish for reunification; even those who did not particularly want reunification hoped to live peacefully with their Northern neighbor. After conducting analysis on survey and interview responses, it seems that where this shared vision of peace varies among those for and against reunification is in the individual's *perspective*. This difference in perspective can be divided into two dimensions: one is the long-term versus the short-term, and the other is idealism versus realism.

To clarify this assertion, it is imperative to examine the basics elements of the answers provided by respondents. Essentially, those who do not want reunification still want a peaceful coexistence. Does peaceful coexistence count as reunification? Certainly not — peaceful coexistence, as expressed by multiple respondents, is simply North and South Korea living peacefully as two neighboring countries, while conducting diplomatic, economic, and cultural exchange. Nevertheless, peaceful coexistence is seen by those who want reunification as one of the steps on the path to unification; it is, for all intents and purposes, the first step to reunification. Clearly, this first step has not occurred at this point in time. Therefore, those who do not want reunification can be said to view reunification through a short-term, pragmatic lens,

that because the two Koreas have not even reached this "First Step," reunification cannot be considered a viable option for the future.

As for those who want reunification, none claimed it would come easy. The majority of respondents shared concerns in the same areas, regardless of their opinion on reunification.[27] However, there was a sense of optimism amongst those who wanted reunification. All shared the same want for peaceful reunification (whose first step is a peaceful, more open coexistence, just as suggested by those who do not want reunification). This can be defined as a "step-by-step", or Natural Reunification, framework. To quote one interviewee: "North and South Korea are two different countries, two different systems. Therefore, reunification should come slowly, not happen overnight." There was unilateral consensus on this idea of a slow, natural reunification amongst pro-reunification respondents, with the first step being peaceful coexistence — the same concept discussed by those opposed to reunification.

Analyzing the responses, this connection fascinated me. I began this project assuming that *Giseong Sedae* had the greatest variation of views on reunification as compared to the generations directly above (70<) and below (30>) them. To my surprise, not only do the majority of participants in my study want reunification — comparing those for and against reunification, there is merely a time-related perceptive difference that separates their visions for inter-Korean reconciliation. But is this truly surprising? The views of current-day *Giseong Sedae* are a culmination of their shared historical experiences and personal micro- and macro-level social connections. Growing up under intense nation building and nationalism, experiencing conflicting narratives of *Han Minjok* and Red Scare, deeply affected by religious and political affiliation and family ties, and being caught between a generation separated by Cold War politics and a

[27] Refer to the graph on page 32.

generation that lacks personal connection to a unified Korea are shared aspects that inform *Giseong Sedae's* conceptualizations of reunification.

Nostalgia for a unified Korea exists amongst those for and against reunification within *Giseong Sedae*, to the point that the lines between their differing opinions on reunification become blurred. This shared sentiment can be summarized by this surveyee's response: "We want to live together in peace through economic and cultural exchanges."

Although I would like to end the thesis on this note, anecdotally, I could not pass up discussion of the generational gap that exists between *Giseong Sedae* and *MZ Sedae* (Millennials and Generation Z). As previously mentioned, much of the *MZ Sedae* has lost the sense of necessity for reunification, or at least change in the current state of affairs as expressed by most members of *Giseong Sedae*. One of the interviewees, whose children are Korean American members of *MZ Sedae*, shared this:

> "I used to hear the stories [of North Korea and the Korean War] from my grandmothers and my parents, [so I feel a strong personal connection to both North Korea and the idea of reunification] … My generation [as a whole] takes these [stories and connections] very personally … However, my children don't seem to feel [the same personal connection] as me. [To be honest,] I haven't [re]told much of these stories [to them]. [When I do, I can tell my children view these same stories as if they are from] an old, faraway country."

A Generation Apart: Generational Hindrances to Reunification

Is the method of slow, natural reunification too good to be true? With each new generation, the necessity for reunification declines, and the gap between the North and South widens even further. For South Korea's *MZ Sedae*, North Korea is a world away. There is a clear generational gap in the way current *Giseong Sedae* view North Korea and reunification with that of their own *MZ* children. While this was not the crux of my research, I was able to discuss this

topic with two members of *MZ Sedae* whose parents were participants in my study.[28] One shared their reflections on hearing her own parents' responses to reunification:

> "I considered myself someone who really thought about North Koreans as my family and thought about reunification more than those my age … I grew up near North Korean *refugee* government housing, so I have met many North Korean refugees through church and school … [My parents told me about their answers to your questions, and] I realized that I really don't [think of North Koreans as family as much as my parents' generation] …
>
> "My mom taught North Korean refugee students in her elementary school, and even after retiring, she has many North Korean refugee friends and people she volunteers with to help the refugee community, so I expected her to want reunification and think of herself as *Han Minjok* with North Koreans. I thought my dad wouldn't want reunification, but to my surprise the first thing he said was that we have to reunify because we are *Han Minjok*. This really shocked me…
>
> "Compared to them, I don't really see [North and South Koreans] as *one nation*…I have empathy for [North Koreans] and want to help them because they are a *minority* here [in South Korea], but I really don't think of [North Koreans] as family like my parents do." [29]

The other shared similar sentiments:

> "Because I received education [that] reunification [is necessary], I used to feel the necessity of reunification, that 'Obviously, we have to reunify!' However, now, I don't really feel [the pull] of its necessity. When I heard you discuss your survey and interview questions, I realized, those are questions I've never really asked myself … [My dad] took your survey; [he said he believes reunification has to happen.] This might be shocking, but I didn't know that my dad thought so deeply about reunification and wanted it so much. We only spoke about reunification one other time in my life, when [the 2018 Summit] was on the news. Although he seemed to want [the talks] to go well, he spoke from a very pessimistic perspective. I didn't realize that he actually wanted reunification so much."

[28] I did not share any responses.
[29] Italics added for emphasis.

They continued: "[The only time I've discussed reunification with someone my age is when] my friend brought [the topic] up. She spoke about it in an extremely negative way; her perspective basically was, 'Why do we need reunification?'"

The other chimed in to describe *MZ Sedae*'s general attitude toward their Northern neighbor: "To us, North Korea [itself] is a meme; [people don't really view it as our sister nation]. It's like… 'Oh, did those [expletive] shoot nukes again? Where at this time?' 'Did we send [them] rice again? Our rice prices have gone up though…' [laughing] This is how our generation thinks. People don't take it seriously."

These informal responses by members of *MZ Sedae* to their own parents' views of reunification provides this research with an interesting perspective on the current generational gap. Though we observed the majority of *Giseong Sedae* respondents consistently discuss the necessity for a slow, natural reunification, there is a sense of urgency amongst not only these members of *Giseong Sedae*, but rising members of *MZ Sedae* who want reunification to happen eventually. One of the girls from *MZ Sedae* remarked, "If we can reunify somehow, it would be better to do so sooner rather than later."

Realistically, for a peaceful reunification to take place, it certainly necessitates a natural process. However, due to the shifting attitudes in *MZ Sedae*, it cannot happen too slowly. As addressed in this research, there are many obstacles to reunification; however, the longer reunification takes, the less people want it and less likely it will happen. When faced with this reality, reunification of Korea ultimately depends on the joint efforts of *Giseong Sedae* and *MZ Sedae*.

While reunification remains an ideal, the reality of the situation indicates a disconnect. Members of *Giseong Sedae* say they want reunification, yet the first step to reunification has not even been realized. This explains why members of *MZ Sedae* are surprised by their parents' thoughts on reunification. *MZ Sedae* are willing to say the quiet part out loud — reunification is not a priority, because they are comfortable with the current state of affairs. As a generation that has held significant civic influence for the past few decades, *Giseong Sedae*'s actions seem to coincide with *MZ Sedae*'s indifference. Nevertheless, members of *Giseong Sedae* are unable to escape this ideal, as everything from their upbringing and education, family ties to division, and personal affiliations to religious and political ideas all point to reunification as an unrelenting vision of Korea's future.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Survey

Age

- How old are you? 귀하의 나이가 어떻게 되십니까?

Sex

- What is your sex? 귀하의 성별이 어떻게 되십니까?

Residence

- What is your country of birth? 귀하의 출생 국가가 어떻게 되십니까?
- What is your country of residence? 귀하의 현재 거주하는 국가가 어떻게 되십니까?

Education and Occupation

- Please share a bit about your educational background. 귀하의 교육 수준에 대해 말해주십시오.
- What is your occupation? 귀하는 어떤 분야에 종사하십니까?

North Korea

- Do you have any familial ties to North Korea that you are comfortable sharing? 귀하의 가족은 북한과 관련이 있으십니까? (예: 부모님이나 조부모가 실향민인 경우)
- If you do not have any family from the North, do you have family who fought in the Korean War? 없으신다면, 한국전쟁(6.25)에 참전한 가족이 있으십니까?

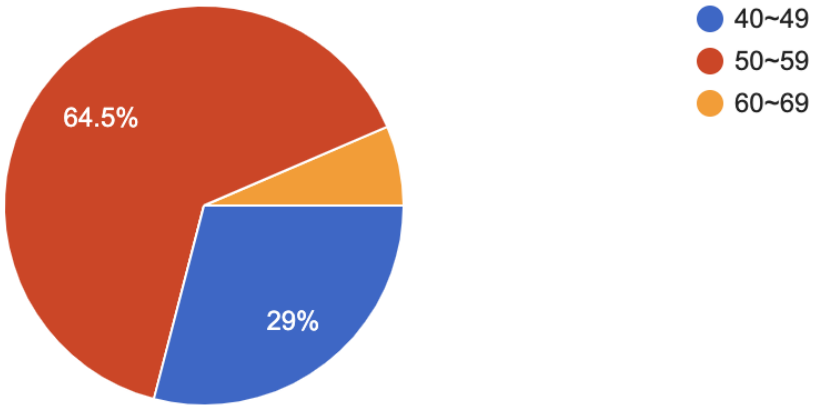
Reunification

- What is your general sentiment toward the issue of Korean reunification? 귀하는 한반도 통일문제에 대하여 어떻게 생각하십니까?
- I would like to see reunification under the following circumstance. 다음과 같은 상황에서 통일이 되었으면 합니다.
- Regarding reunification, what are you most interested in or concerned about? Please check all that apply. 통일 관련 가장 큰 관심사는 무엇입니까? 해당되는 모든 사항을 표시해 주십시오.
- Please justify your reasons for your answer to the previous question. 위 질문에서 해당답변을 선택한 이유에 관하여 (200 자 이하로) 설명해 주십시오.

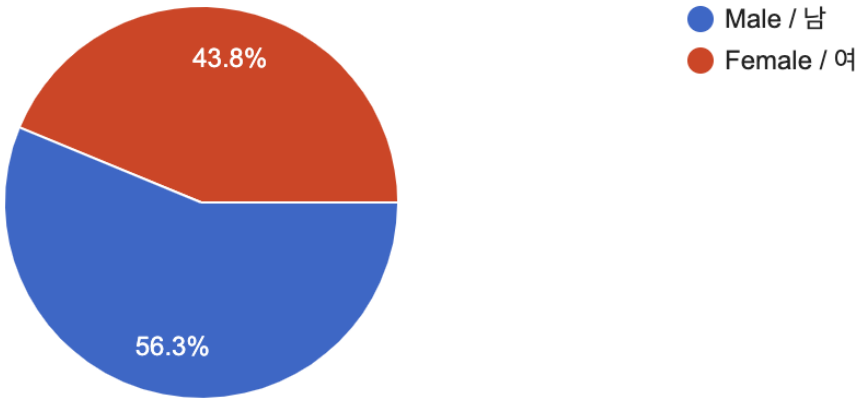
- How often do you talk about reunification with those around you (such as family and friends)? 가족이나 친구 등 주위 사람들과 통일문제에 대해서 어느 정도 대화를 하십니까?
- Would you say your opinions on reunification would be considered... 통일에 관한 당신의 의견은 같은 연령 집단과 얼마나 유사하다고 생각하십니까?

Appendix B: Survey Demographic Charts and Graphs

B.1 Age



B.2 Sex



B.3 Occupation

EDUCATION	HOMECARE	BUSINESS & COMMERCE	RELIGION	OTHER
Educator x2 초등학교 교사 — Elementary School Teacher Professor 교육 — Education 피아노교사 — Piano Reacher 요양보호사 — Caregiver	Housewife 주부 x3	에너지공기업 — Public Energy Company 상업 — Business 관리직 — Executive 반도체 사업 — Semiconductor Business 직장인 — Office Worker International Logistics Shipping Company 자동차부품제조업 — Auto Parts Manufacturing 통신업종 — Telecommunication Industry Insurance Agent + Security (two jobs) 비파괴검사 — Non-destructive Testing and Inspection (NDTI) 금융(은행) — Finance (Bank) 운수업 — Transportation Business	목사 — Pastor x4 Missionary	Pharmacist 사회복지 — Social Welfare

Appendix C: Foreign Language Source Graphs

C.1 Subjective Political Orientation Survey: 2016~2021 (Gallup Korea [a], 2021)

● **주관적 정치 성향**: 2016~2020년(1월만 제시), 2020년 7월~2021년 12월(월별)

조사 시기	주관적 정치 성향						(계)			Net Score (보수-진보)
	매우 보수적	약간 보수적	중도적	약간 진보적	매우 진보적	성향 유보	매우+약간 보수적	중도적 + 성향유보	매우+약간 진보적	
2016년 1월	6%	25%	31%	22%	3%	13%	31%	44%	25%	6
2017년 1월	7%	20%	26%	31%	6%	10%	27%	36%	37%	-10
2018년 1월	4%	22%	27%	28%	5%	14%	26%	41%	33%	-7
2019년 1월	5%	19%	30%	26%	5%	15%	24%	45%	31%	-7
2020년 1월	6%	20%	29%	23%	6%	16%	26%	45%	29%	-3
…										…
7월	5%	19%	30%	24%	5%	17%	24%	47%	29%	-5
8월	4%	21%	29%	24%	5%	18%	25%	47%	28%	-3
9월	4%	19%	32%	23%	5%	18%	23%	50%	27%	-4
10월	4%	19%	31%	23%	5%	18%	23%	49%	27%	-4
11월	4%	20%	30%	23%	5%	17%	25%	48%	28%	-3
12월	5%	19%	31%	22%	4%	19%	24%	49%	27%	-3
2021년 1월	5%	20%	31%	22%	6%	16%	25%	47%	28%	-3
2월	6%	20%	31%	22%	6%	16%	25%	47%	28%	-3
3월	6%	20%	31%	22%	5%	16%	26%	47%	27%	-1
4월	5%	20%	33%	20%	5%	16%	26%	49%	26%	0
5월	5%	22%	32%	20%	6%	15%	27%	47%	26%	1
6월	5%	20%	31%	21%	5%	17%	25%	48%	27%	-2
7월	6%	20%	31%	21%	6%	17%	26%	48%	26%	0
8월	6%	21%	31%	21%	5%	17%	27%	48%	25%	2
9월	6%	20%	32%	18%	6%	17%	26%	50%	24%	2
10월	7%	21%	32%	19%	5%	16%	28%	49%	23%	5
11월	7%	23%	33%	18%	5%	15%	30%	48%	22%	8
2021년 12월	**6%**	**21%**	**34%**	**18%**	**5%**	**15%**	**28%**	**49%**	**23%**	**5**

질문) 귀하 본인의 정치적 성향은 다음 중 어디에 해당한다고 생각하십니까? (5점 척도)
- 매우 보수적 / 약간 보수적 / 중도적 / 약간 진보적 / 매우 진보적. 성향 유보='모름/응답거절'

- 매월 통합 기준. 월별 사례수 평균 약 4,000명. 한국갤럽 데일리 오피니언 www.gallup.co.kr

C.2 The Necessity of Reunification: Ratio of Responses by Political Orientation (SNU, 2021)

통일의 필요성

• 정치 성향별 응답 비율

지역	매우 필요하다				약간 필요하다				반반/ 그저 그렇다 (보통이다)				별로 필요하지 않다				전혀 필요하지 않다			
	'18	'19	'20	'21	'18	'19	'20	'21	'18	'19	'20	'21	'18	'19	'20	'21	'18	'19	'20	'21
진보적	27.5	31.6	27.5	19.5	39.1	35.9	38.6	32.8	21.8	21.0	16.7	24.0	10.0	8.6	14.1	20.7	1.6	3.0	3.1	3.0
중 도	16.5	14.0	16.1	11.4	40.8	28.1	31.6	31.1	26.4	32.6	27.3	27.9	13.1	20.1	20.7	24.6	3.2	5.2	4.2	5.0
보수적	22.7	16.2	20.8	12.3	30.2	41.1	23.0	28.1	22.4	19.3	21.1	24.5	21.8	16.5	26.0	28.7	2.9	6.9	9.1	6.5

C.3 What religion do you currently believe in? (If any) which one? (Gallup Korea [b], 2021)

질문) 귀하는 현재 믿으시는 종교가 있습니까? (있다면) 어느 종교를 믿으십니까?

2021년 3월 18일~4월 7일		사례수 (명)	현재 믿는 종교				
			불교	개신교	천주교	기타	없음
전체		1,500	16%	17%	6%	0.4%	60%
성별	남성	743	12%	16%	5%	1%	66%
	여성	757	20%	19%	7%	0%	54%
연령별	19~29세	251	4%	14%	3%	1%	78%
	30대	235	6%	19%	5%		70%
	40대	284	11%	15%	6%	0%	68%
	50대	297	23%	14%	6%	1%	57%
	60대 이상	432	28%	23%	8%		41%
직업별	농/임/어업	27	-	-	-	-	-
	자영업	189	25%	18%	6%	0%	51%
	기능노무/서비스	546	15%	16%	5%	1%	63%
	사무/관리	300	10%	19%	7%	0%	64%
	전업주부	247	28%	20%	6%		46%
	학생	82	3%	13%	4%	1%	79%
	무직/은퇴/기타	109	10%	20%	6%		64%
지역별	서울	291	15%	21%	8%		56%
	인천/경기	474	10%	20%	7%	0%	64%
	강원	46	-	-	-	-	-
	대전/세종/충청	160	11%	21%	7%	1%	61%
	광주/전라	149	12%	22%	7%	0%	58%
	대구/경북	149	24%	12%	4%	1%	59%
	부산/울산/경남	231	32%	6%	2%	1%	59%

- 소수점 아래 반올림 때문에 백분율 합계는 ±1 차이 발생 가능하며, 이는 오류가 아님
- 50사례 미만은 수치 제시하지 않음. 한국갤럽 한국인의 종교 2021 www.gallup.co.kr