

# Is South Korea Ready for Reunification?

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SOO KIM, JUN 24 2013

### Reunification of the Koreas: Is South Korea Ready?

Following the 1945 Allied victory of World War II that ended Japan's colonial rule of Korea, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to split the Korean Peninsula along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel against major opposition from the Korean people. The resulting armistice agreement granted temporary rights of occupation to both nations over the disjointed territories under the assumption that assigning trusteeships would eventually help to establish a free and independent Korea.[1] However, failures to abide by prearranged procedures of the United Nations by the Soviet Union in the North resulted in the creation of a communist state, while the United States' influence in the South instilled a Western-like democracy. Two very different countries were formed, and their differences have only increased as the years wore on. As it stands, South Korea is now one of the wealthiest, most industrialized states in the world. It emerged from an initial period of economic struggle to become a powerful and relatively successful free-market democracy. On the other hand, North Korea is a poor and isolated nation. Unlike its southern neighbor, its government maintains a Stalinist ideology and perpetuates a cult of personality around North Korea's political leaders.[2] Given that these two countries lie on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of political, economic and social factors, it is difficult to imagine a reunited Korean polity. Even if the heavily guarded Korean Demilitarized Zone was eradicated and the borderline bisecting the Korean Peninsula was dissolved, both Koreas' respective institutional structures impede the integration of two separate societies. South Korea's domestic frameworks are especially unprepared to take on the responsibilities of facilitating a peaceful and successful reunification. Confronted with the expectation of accommodating the many needs of its underdeveloped northern neighbor, South Korea will be unable to provide such support without incurring political, economic and social costs to its own nation. And no amount of foreign aid or external policies will be able to alleviate such internal damages. Outside intervention to provide aid with the arising reunification problems would be analogous to treating the symptoms and not the cause. Therefore, under the present circumstances, reunification would not be beneficial to the main actors involved. Such a process would bring upon regional instability that could upset even the more stable democratic society of South Korea, consequently incapacitating a great ally of the United States and the key player in one of East Asia's greatest regional conflicts.

There are several scenarios for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. There is unification through conflict, such as war.[3] The 1950 Korean War represents an attempt to reunify the divided nations of South and North Korea under this design. Unfortunately, this short-lived war had devastating effects on both countries, resulting in severe casualties and economic hardships for the entire region. Unification can also be achieved through collapse and absorption. Due to the increasing unlikelihood of North Korean regime survival, this absorption would most likely occur by South Korea or North Korea.[4] While there will undoubtedly be less outright and grand military violence, this method of reunification would occur rapidly, like the first scenario, and result in inevitable clashes between the two populations. Especially because of the limited contact between the Korean nations, both societies of people are unprepared to come together. The most peaceful method of uniting the Korean Peninsula would be through system evolution and gradual integration.[5] Such a process would primarily focus on promoting cultural exchanges and slowly opening contact between the two societies. This gradual warming of relations between two nations requires a longer waiting period before the actual reunification can occur.[6] It necessitates active cooperation between both governments and long-term planning to steadily deconstruct the political, economic and social boundaries that divide the two populations. Once reunification is secured, the newly created state can be managed in one of two ways.

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Firstly, the resulting Korean state can function as a confederation.[7] Following the principle of “one state, one nation, two systems, two governments,” this confederation would evenly split representation between the southern and northern regions without any regard to the South-to-North population disparity.[8] The second option involves the creation of a combined national government that South Korea would undoubtedly dominate due to its larger population and stronger state capabilities. Effectively annexing the North Korean nation under this model of legislation, South Korea would enforce a democracy and presumably abandon the North Korean system.[9] Having studied the historical precedence set by the reunification of Germany, which embraces the reunification paradigm of gradual absorption and the establishment of a combined government, South Korea hopes to follow a similar route towards reunification. In doing so, it seeks to anticipate and better mitigate the same problems that arose in the East-West Germany scenario.

Unfortunately, based on a comparative case study analysis between Germany and Korea, there are numerous unforeseen consequences of following the German model, and in fact going through with reunification procedures at all. Many of these costs stem from the current domestic situations in the North-South scenario that were not present in East and West Germany.[10] For one, South Korea still has a relatively new and weak democracy. While it is nowhere near as totalitarian as North Korea's current regime, South Korea has experienced centuries of Asian monarchies followed by periods of autocratic and military rule that have led to its currently weak democratic traditions. Its current government is a democracy only in name; South Korea has yet to achieve the desired standard of political liberalism. Political processes are still tainted with dishonesty and cronyism, and facets of the media continue to be oppressed. Many citizens maintain that: “Corruption is more regular; South Korean parties are shallow, personalized, and change names quickly; elitist political unresponsiveness drives a street-protest culture and brawling in the National Assembly.”[11] The extreme polarization of political parties that only seek to smear each other's names prevent the government from fostering national togetherness and making progress on many social issues.[12] The lack of political organization and federal muscle seriously undermines South Korea's legislating capabilities. As a result, this weak government has allowed the elite to gain much power over state affairs. In the absence of traditional government safeguards to prevent such sway from external influence, the rapidly modernizing South Korea has become beholden to the wealthy bourgeoisie.[13]

Elite domination within democracies is a common consequence in countries where democracies are implemented instead of being naturally developed. For example, early Filipino democracy was “plagued by division and corruption.”[14] The country's ingrained and historically unchallenged elitist socioeconomic structure impeded any and all democratic reform that was administered under the guidance of the United States. Tied to a traditional land tenure system, citizens of the Philippines could not establish a strong commitment to democratic principles: “The interests of the rich and the obligations of extended family and patron-client loyalties outweighed by far the abstract notions of the rule of law or appeals to the common interest.”[15] Consequently, the forcible expansion of the democratic political sphere primarily gave the elites greater opportunities to redistribute agrarian reform efforts for their own benefit and to strengthen their political standing. Similar events occurred in trying to implement democracies across Latin America, such as in the Dominican Republic.[16] In the wake of the May 1961 assassination of dictator Rafael Trujillo, the United States hoped to help instill a new democratic government that would prevent the reemergence of an autocracy. Despite his brutal regime, Trujillo had left the Dominican Republic with conditions that were believed to be favorable to the establishment of a democracy. The growth of the country's economy and modernization under Trujillo's dictatorship were thought to encourage the rise of a liberal democracy. In actuality, these developments concentrated the wealth and political control into the hands of those who were already empowered.[17]

The lack of strong civil societies within these countries contributed to such elite domination. The widespread depoliticization of the people created a vacuum of political institutions and civil groups, meaning that the population had been disenfranchised from organizing around common goals and purposes. This failure to cultivate the coming together of citizens through associations resulted in selfish individualism, creating less accommodation and tolerance for pluralism and active oppression over already marginalized peoples.[18] In saying so, while a civil society does exist in South Korea, the general trend of civic movements has been criticized for its growing attitude of exclusivity. The former Secretary General of the Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) has argued that some civic movements have become too bureaucratic and lack citizen participation. Adopting illegal tactics and disregarding

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grassroots movements, these civic movements instill new monopolistic institutions under the façade of upholding a democratic and pluralist society. And so, instead of checking the government from acting upon vested interests and ensuring that proper representation of the people is secured, civil organizations remain aligned with conservative forces that seek to protect the status quo.[19]

South Korea's overall weak democracy creates the potential for increasing the monopolization of the economy. Especially in the face of sudden national instability, which would inevitably occur upon reunification with North Korea, the absence of a strong government that is autonomous from the elitist bourgeoisie can lead to unrestrained abuses of wealth and power. Even West Germany, which arguably had a stronger democratic state capacity in 1989 than South Korea has in present times, could not control the reckless privatization of firms, monopolism and expansionism by the West German bourgeoisie in the aftermath of German reunification.[20] For example, to comply with the principle of "regeneration and fair competition" underlined in the Unification Treaty between West and East Germany, the former country established a state sponsored Treuhandanstalt or a trust corporation.[21] This agency was to oversee East Germany's state-owned corporations and integrate the socialist state's economy with West German capitalism through the "renovation and privatization" of East German firms.[22] However, not enough management could control powerful, conglomerate West German firms from buying most of the East German companies to procure investment subsidies and eliminate economic competition. Moreover, instead of revitalizing East German industries, the West German bourgeoisie tended to use acquired properties as an "extended workbench for West German industry." [23] Devalued and reduced to nothing more than a vestigial limb of a greater Western corporation, these East German plants were often the first ones to close in times of low economic productivity, of which were many once the East German market became effectively immobilized after being pitted against West German industries. Despite massive community projects and industrial concessions to support East German establishments, such as government programs like "German Unity" and "Upturn East," this money and policy action did not fully mitigate the problem. Consequently, uncontrolled capitalism in the East eventually classed East Germany as a "deindustrialized landscape." [24] The ensuing West German prejudice against East German products became difficult, if not impossible, to overturn.[25] East Germany was not seen as legitimate competition to the West, perpetuating an image of Eastern inferiority and a "rejection of all things Eastern." [26] Paralleling the mindset of colonizers during the age of imperial colonialism, the West increasingly began to view the East as simply an annexed region that would only provide a new source of resources and revenue.[27]

One can certainly imagine a worse scenario overtaking the Korean nation in the aftermath of reunification with North Korea. Especially because South Korea's politics have become so closely intertwined with the economic sector, the country's government already has enough trouble confronting its corporate monopolies. These corporate monopolies first became empowered as a result of South Korea's origins as a developmental state.[28] This model requires the government to regularly intervene in private sector activities and enact mercantilist policies. Protecting the public from market failure, a developmental state regulates the success of handpicked industries through aggressive state support. This sort of direct investment promotes economic growth and reduces the potential of capital flight, securing the future of the selected firms. However, in imposing more state control over the economy, the developmental state is also meant to preserve its independent political power.[29] In the case of South Korea, the government was not able to maintain autonomy from the rising corporate class: "Businessmen used the rents from cheap capital to expand as rapidly as possible, thus ensuring their continued economic importance. Development and money politics proceeded hand in hand." [30] From there on, political manipulation through bribes and favors grew in frequency: "That the state is neutral, picks winners, and provides public goods because the civil service is insulated from social influences – is difficult to sustain empirically." [31] When South Korea began its transition towards a more liberal democracy, a demand for campaign funds and the competition for electoral support presented more opportunities for businesses to influence the government.[32] As such, an "intensification of exploitation" has become South Korea's primary method for maintaining corporate profitability and international competitiveness.[33] At the cost of discouraging development and increased levels of free market competition and production, these *chaebols*, as South Korean business conglomerates have come to be called, have become the main pillars of the country's economy. The resulting lack of jobs and entrepreneurial creativity within South Korean society merely perpetuate their importance and continued state support. There are few small businesses that can survive against these large corporations. Only a handful of competitors can overcome the political and immeasurable economic advantage of *chaebols*. Subsequently, economic disparities have grown increasingly stark. Very little of the economic pie is left for

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the rest of the masses after the *chaebols* use their influence to protect what is definitely more than their fair share. Especially in times of economic crises, the corporate class is able to guard itself from sustaining financial hits. For example, in 1998, when South Korean GDP contracted by 6 percent, the top 10 percent of Koreans saw their incomes decreasing by only 2.5 percent. Meanwhile, the poorest 20 percent of Koreans saw their incomes decrease by a quarter.[34]

This sort of economic condition will only worsen in the face of reunification with North Korea. Just as West Germany could not prevent the mismanagement of East German reform efforts, South Korea will not be able to stop its elite from manipulating North Korean aid. Such events will deepen class divides within a reunited Korean Peninsula and bring about socioeconomic conflict. Especially because North Korea is a resource rich region, there will be more fortunes to be extracted and directed into the hands of the *chaebols*. Based on a Goldman Sachs report entitled “A United Korea? Reassessing North Korea Risks,” there is an estimated 700 billion won in mineral resources beneath North Korean land that can be exhumed with the aid of advanced technology. Containing some of the world’s largest deposits of rare earth metals, North Korea can provide for most of South Korea’s mineral imports in millions of tons.[35] While these natural resources could be a “valuable asset in building an economic community and raising funds in the process of unification,”[36] there is a greater potential that they will become a socioeconomic burden. In other words, a united Korea can fall victim to the resource curse. The theory behind the resource curse refers to the paradoxical correlation between countries with an abundant amount of natural resources and their stunted economies. It hypothesizes that resource rich countries often struggle with development as opposed to countries with fewer natural resources due to a multitude of reasons, one being political mismanagement of the state’s immense wealth. Unfortunately, based off of South Korea’s economic track record and the government’s close ties with powerful *chaebols*, the likelihood that South Korea will not be able to properly allocate a sudden acquirement of wealth is high. It is incredibly easy to predict an invasion of wealthy Southern outsiders buying up North Korean land and partaking in economic opportunism upon reunification.[37] The fact that many North Korean citizens do not have the skills to use most modern technology allows Southerners to further marginalize the Northern population. As such, a reunified Korean state has the potential to aggravate current domestic inequities, while economically displacing an entire new workforce. The sociopolitical and socioeconomic inequalities will continue to grow, provoking more unrest from the original South Korean population in addition to the adjoined people of the former North Korean state.

These domestic instabilities are amplified by a culturally unprepared South Korean society that is not particularly welcoming of North Koreans. In the German model for reunification, there was more pre-existing interaction between West and East Germany. East Germany was not as closed off to foreigners as North Korea is today, and a lot of cross-cultural exchanges between the two nations were able to occur. In fact, after the division, West Germany encouraged visits into East Germany to maintain “national homogeneity.”[38] Ratifying the Basis of Relations Treaty in 1972, both West and East Germany agreed to promote “value integration” through interpersonal contacts, the flow of information, ease of travel, etc. in order to maintain good relations.[39] Looking back on the German scenario, unification was desired by both nations. The resulting social pressures undoubtedly played an essential role in driving the reunification process. For example, as South Korean political scientist Hwang In Kwan describes, German unification took place “from below.”[40] Especially in East Germany, public support for the creation of a united German nation led to popular demonstrations, which influenced general elections and ultimately determined the national political stance on the issue. Meanwhile, in West Germany, *Financial Times* European Editor David Marsh notes in 1994: “There was a national consensus in favor of unification...Reflecting the bonds of history and culture, and the millions of shared recollections and family ties, many West Germans felt a vague sense of responsibility for their compatriots.”[41] And so, as East Germany began to face rapid political dissolution, the prospect of reunification was never simply a possibility – it was almost expected.

South Korea is not nearly as open-minded or committed to the reunification cause. Aside from the handful of opportunists who hope to exploit material gains from North Korea, there are few who want to reunify with their Northern neighbors. Many South Korean citizens simply do not see the benefits of reunification. If the financial costs to undergoing such a process are not enough of a major deterrent, there is a huge “wall of the mind” that has formed since the division of the Korean Peninsula disconnecting South Korean citizens from their North Korean brethren.[42] Unlike the cordial relation that West Germany was able to form with East Germany, South Korea virtually shares no contact with its northern counterpart. The relative isolation and seclusion of North Korea prevents the two societies of

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Koreans from connecting and sharing their cultures, inhibiting the formation of mutual trust and understanding. After more than half a century of separation, the North Korean population has become this “other” group that is different and apart from the South Korean population, breaking any sort of affinity that these two societies once had for one another. The lack of South Korean national consensus on the reunification issue signifies that the country has lost the battle towards peaceful reunification before the fight has even started. Under these circumstances, South Korea cannot be expected to lead the tumultuous process of unifying two nations for the long haul without facing social upheaval and resistance. Major socio-cultural barriers would have to be overcome before such a process could even be considered, and a desire to form one national homogenous population would have to be instilled. Anything short of a strong commitment to the cause would undoubtedly push the South Korean country to become resentful of the burden and to squander its chances of achieving true South-North integration.

In part, West and East German societies faced problems during the integration process because of declining devotion to the reunification cause. Losing sight of the end goal once difficulties arose, West Germany became impatient with and less tolerant of East German differences, growing increasingly antagonistic towards the latter population.[43] In the German scenario, once the seeds of resentment were planted within West German society, the discontent quickly festered and grew out of control. As more and more economic and political legislations were enacted to help East Germans acclimate to West German life, there was more and more frustration over the expensive processes. Efforts to give financial assistance to East Germans and to place political power in their hands eventually made the Western people feel bitter. The growing West German notion that East Germans were getting too much, undeserved assistance spurred tensions between these two populations. For example, *Financial Times* European Editor David Marsh reports in 1994 that there was “great resentment in the East against West Germans’ expectations that East Germans should feel gratitude towards the enormous financial transfers they received.”[44] Such expectations amplified the feeling that West Germany was a paternal colonizer, while East Germany was nothing more than a primitive Third World country receiving aid. Furthermore, in the relatively rich German state of Bavaria, the Christian Social Union party released a statement in 1998 expressing “irritation at having to support the east when many in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic), instead of being grateful, preferred to vote PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism).”[45] The PDS was the legal successor to the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which had ruled the GDR until the country’s collapse in 1990. Upon East Germany’s reunification with West Germany, it became one of the more popular political parties to be supported by the former East Germany population, although it did not hold much favor with the West Germans. However, due to its committed Eastern following, the PDS was able to exert a considerable amount of influence in the government to the dismay of West German society. It was able to enact into law leftward legislations such as the 1997 Erfurt Declaration, which called for “greater political activity outside the parliament, and for an end to the Cold War against the social state.”[46] Many West Germans discredited these laws as being nothing “but disguised attempt[s] to re-establish repressive socialism.”[47] They viewed these efforts to uphold socialist policies as a way of undermining West German democracy and bringing about the rise of communism. West Germany’s sensitivity to any and all remaining vestiges of the East German regime drove the newly united nation to become increasingly suspicious of ulterior political intentions and to cast many accusations against the East German constituency.

To its credit, West Germany’s claims against the East German population were arguably legitimate. Many East German citizens did want to return to communism. They remained faithful to leftwing parties such as the PDS because they were nostalgic for their old lives. Their initial hopes and joys over reunification with West Germany had faded into disappointment and bitterness within a few years of the union. The East Germans’ desire to revert back to communism was a reasonable reaction to the social alienation they felt in West German society.[48] Being unable to reform to their new living standards, the East German population desired the familiarity of communism. In fact, an estimated 57 percent of East Germans wanted “an improved form of communism.”[49] An opinion poll conducted in May 1993 revealed that only 22 percent of West Germans and 11 percent of East Germans felt national “togetherness,” while 71 percent of West Germans and 85 percent of East Germans felt that there were “opposing interests.”[50] Such studies reveal how an inability to accept and understand ingrained socio-cultural differences perpetuates divides between societies. Despite the preparations that were made before the actual reunification, West Germany’s refusal to recognize and accommodate any aspect of East German society ultimately drove its eastern citizens away. This exchange of misunderstandings, this great mental wall, prevented West German society from becoming united with its eastern counterpart in spirit and mind. As such, the transition towards integration

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retrogressed into intolerance. West German society began to impose active economic and political pressures on citizens to completely abandon East German culture and convert to a West German lifestyle. Clashes between the two populations of Germans eventually evolved to create Western bias and stigmatization against all things that were Eastern.

From examining the social welfare status of current North Korean refugees in South Korea, one can see that social tensions over societal differences have already been converted into great prejudice and discrimination. Just as East Germans found themselves being treated more and more like second-class citizens, North Koreans living in South Korea attest to similar treatment. This contempt towards North Koreans is representative of South Korea's deep seeded social fears regarding the ramifications of reunification, which have been cultivated under an atmosphere of misunderstanding and misinformation. For example, most of the opposition towards reunification comes from lower-income sectors of the South Korean population. Intimidated by the surge of unskilled workers that will enter the country, South Korean citizens with a lower standard of living believe that the inflow of refugees will devastate the economy.[51] Ignoring the fact that the South Korean economy is already slowly devastating itself through monopolistic exploitation, they are more than ready to lay their financial woes upon North Korean scapegoats without seeing the benefits that can be potentially gained from the addition of resource rich land. Meanwhile, the views of reunification in South Korea among the youth are dangerously indifferent. In a Korea Youth Development Institute survey of South Korean high school students conducted in September 2000, the researchers found that there was an overall lack of interest in the reunification issue. Such findings conclude that there is a great absence of education on the topic within South Korea.[52] This lack of knowledge has resulted in social attitudes that maintain that all North Koreans are violent, brainwashed criminals who seek to cause only trouble. Lazy and inferior due to living in a socialist state, they are incapable of supporting themselves.[53] Such attitudes, which are based on nothing but ignorance, are demeaning and psychologically damaging to a group of peoples who have escaped suffering in one country only to encounter more in another.[54] They undermine the efficacy of government support programs for defectors by weakening North Koreans' own will to adapt to South Korean society.[55]

Similarly, North Koreans hold negative opinions against South Koreans as well. Due to the psychological programming imposed by the totalitarian regime, most North Koreans adhere to a "military first," *Juche* ideology.[56] This ideology emphasizes the supremacy of North Korea's state regime and maintains that the masses are responsible for the wellbeing of the country's society. Acknowledging the physical inferiority of North Korea, it nevertheless highlights and upholds the totalitarian regime's moral superiority. Following a race-based worldview that contributes to race arrogance and nationalist hysteria, *Juche* thought states: "The [North] Korean people are too pure blooded, and therefore too virtuous, to survive in this evil world without a great paternal leader." [57] The constant propagation of this ideology is able to appease the people through times of intense struggle and poverty. The social isolation of the country further shelters North Koreans from seeing the state of life in other nations and helps perpetuate the belief that North Korea is an exceptionally great country; every other nation is inferior and malevolent. As journalist Christopher Hitchens once stated: "Unlike previous racist dictatorships, the North Korean one has actually succeeded in producing a sort of new species: Starving and stunted dwarves, living in the dark, kept in perpetual ignorance and fear, brainwashed into the hatred of others..." [58] In all, such differences in social thought have created serious obstacles to bringing Koreans closer together. With time and distance having erased all trust between the nations, calls reminding Koreans of their shared history and traditions often go unanswered. South and North Korea are unable to recognize, understand and accommodate the cultural differences that have developed in their respective societies since the division. Instead, both nations have resorted to stigmatizing the other. This lack of social cohesion greatly hinders the opportunity for Koreans to form one national identity and to reunite the Korean Peninsula.

It goes without saying that to achieve the most peaceful North-South Korea integration model, reorganizing the institutional structures supporting South Korea's domestic life must become the utmost priority. As the country that is most like to be absorbing the other, South Korea must be ready to take the brunt of the fall when North Korea's untenable regime collapses. While carrying out such an assignment is no easy task, if the nation can adhere to the basic political, economic and social objectives, then achieving favorable domestic conditions for reunification is certainly foreseeable. Politically, it is important for the government to distance itself from the elite. This distance will not merely mitigate present sociopolitical contentions; it will ease the serious socioeconomic inequalities in South

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Korea. Encouraging a more active civil society is crucial in cleaning the dirty money politics that drive South Korea's government. While it will not be the end-all solution to fixing South Korean society, a civil society is important in creating a more independent liberal democratic government. This independent liberal democratic government will be better able to handle North Korean reform efforts when the time comes, ensuring that they are carried out with the best, collective interests in mind. In doing so, South Korea just may be able to prove to North Korea that a liberal democratic system is superior to a repressive totalitarian regime.[59] By exemplifying how good democracies are able to embody principles of equality and progress, it just may be able to change warped perceptions on capitalism and *Juche*. Moreover, less business intervention in politics will potentially cultivate more economic competition and entrepreneurship, enlarging the workforce. Economically, South Korea should focus on breaking the overwhelming prevalence of corporate monopolies and on encouraging the development of new businesses. It must successfully re-proportion pieces of the economic pie to alleviate the severe economic disparities. With a more stable and equalized economy, the country will be able to financially withstand the influx of a new labor force comprised of unskilled North Korean refugees. Lastly, South Korea's social objectives must revolve around promoting understanding and acceptance. Experiences with how the country treats current North Korean refugees suggest that social obstacles may be the most difficult to overcome. As American scholar Grinker writes in 1998: "Many are distressed by what they perceive to be a general South Korean view that nothing in the north is worth preserving. Whether true or not, such cynical contempt only reinforces antagonism and distrust between the two Koreas." [60]

In conclusion, in the event of regime collapse or the dissolution of the North Korean nation, South Korea in its present state is unprepared to meet the challenges of reunification. While some may point to Germany's reunification model as a means of guidance, the South-North Korea scenario is too different from the East-West Germany experience for reunification to be similarly considered within this context. South Korea's political, economic and social frameworks are too fragile to hold up against such a destabilizing event. The country does not have as strong of a democracy or as active of a free market capitalist economy as West Germany did during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extreme isolation of North Korea has also prevented all interaction between the two Koreas, greatly hindering the process of socio-cultural immersion that West and East Germany was able to develop. Moreover, it is interesting to note that even with all of these preparations set into place, West Germany still faced major domestic struggles and periods of national vulnerability. Taking such experiences into consideration, South Korea is not ready to absorb a society like North Korea. Even if international politics granted such a political union, the domestic conditions in South Korea do not allow the successful implementation of reunification. Such a process could undermine the strides that South Korea has made in the past decades and further aggravate regional conflict.

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