

Barriers to Korean Unification

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Abstract

This paper discusses several challenges and opportunities for Korean unification in the 21st century. These barriers require corresponding action by South Korea and other countries to create greater momentum for change. The United States, China, and other international powers must forestall a new Cold War by seeking further focused cooperation and acceptance of spheres of influence. South Korean nationalism among younger Koreans faces a loss of interest in the North. Limited development of South Korean civil society also limits the impetus for change with respect to women, refugees, and the elderly democracy. Absent more egalitarian development in South Korea's Confucian culture also makes unification more of a long-term prospect at this time.

Keywords: unification, civil society, South Korea, United States, China, nationalism

1. Introduction

The hope for Korean unification should inform the consciences of all global citizens. A true myth is believed and lived to reality. All states are constructions of peoples, and the artificial division of the Korean peninsula, stuck in time and space by the Armistice Agreement, stands to be lived past. Too many families remain divided, and too much human capital is spent constructing and maintaining weapons of war and war machines. Today's two Koreas continue in Cold War-like constellations of rival powers, and current events only indicate the rivalries will grow. This nexus in itself retards the advance of human civilization, as we have a regional, national, and global structure that perpetuates division and stasis. Younger Koreans begin to lose interest in and memory of a united Korea, as many of them have never known a time before the Korean War and do not really know anyone from North Korea. The relatively less-formed civil society of democratic South Korea, in particular regarding the role of women and refugees, generates inadequate impetus for unification.

These are the main issues this article discusses as barriers. Of course, every barrier might be a threat and an opportunity, so the discussion also addresses how to make things better in each instance. And given this approach, it brackets and does not delve into some other important barriers such as infrastructure for unification, the modalities of government under a unified Korea, and how to descale and dismantle rival militaries in the theater, including the forces of the United States.²

In essence, this description of barriers to unification also should suggest the potential for synergies to hasten peaceful reunification, and in the present period, the preliminary phase to peaceful unification, more constructive coexistence. Like Bruce Cumings (2015) talking about the likelihood or scenarios for a collapse of the North is not constructive because that leads the discussion to generate more negative feedback in the present. For that matter, there is little to make it likely the North's regime will collapse anytime soon.

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²This kind of treatment is discussed in Park and Rowan, 2008. That article develops ideas such as unified self-determination through a federalist model, Confucian social democracy, and democratic republicanism. It applies the ideas of *condoperium* from Chi Bong-do, *chajusong* from Victor Cha, the Chinese understanding of peaceful coexistence, rights in an Asian context, and unified neutrality. It also elaborates a number of specific policies for (post-) unification.

Accepting and talking to North Korea will does not work either, with or without material incentives. Diplomatic efforts have reached a high point of ineffectiveness and lack of credibility, no matter the back channels.

The two Koreas are not able to unify and likely will not do so this century. A recent SAIS article (Toloraya, 2016) elegantly but disturbingly discounted the possibility of Korean unification as completely a matter of costs and threats to the North, South, and China. Any realistic assessment of the global and regional context as a competition among rival powers, together with fracturing ethnic nationalism in the Koreas and an inadequately prepared Korean civil society, make this assessment reasonable.

Attending to international superpower rivalries and limitations of South Korean civil society might not be bad ways to build momentum over the long-term. Looking at the fall of the former Soviet Union or the unification of Germany might reveal some parallels here, but those are different, if related stories.

2. Barrier One: Another Cold War

China is an advancing, rising power. The United States may be declining. US-ROK vs. NK-China remains a rational dichotomy to consider. China guards her buffer zone and fears an exodus on unification. The American pivot to Asia puts China on guard. Trump's unpredictability is not really a tonic to Kim's own use of escalation but may be a further destabilizing influence. Competition in the South China Seas, China's bluewater navy project, and growing pushing of envelopes regarding air and sea and land zones to access world's resources by China situates potential for conflicts. Sino-American competition occurs in terms of development capital banks as well. Stability of bipolar conflict compared to other global systems has its impression in Northeast Asia. The U.S. and China might settle into something more benign than a Cold War, but that does not mean much for unification. U.S. leaning to Japan can push Korea toward China. Reduction in the U.S. military presence can do likewise. Russia is posed to be a spoiler. Opportunity exists for a long-term development of US-China cooperation and understanding of rules of game in the region through the notion of competing and overlapping spheres of influence.

2.1 China

The more roseate of analyses (Choo, 2016; Glaser and Son, 2015) indicates that China is averse to a nuclear peninsula, as it would invite other regional players, including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, to go nuclear. China is not averse to unification, as long as the nexus that obtains post-unification has insurances against a unified Korea becoming an enemy on China's borders. There is some thinking that China would link the Taiwan issue with support for Korean reunification (Choo, 2016).

However, these views wane a bit of late compared to the waxing on of more pessimistic stances. It should not surprise many that China has replaced the former Soviet Union, or even Russia today, as the rival to the U.S. (US and NATO, US and Japan and Korea, etc.) for global hegemony in many minds and corners. China is a superpower for the ages, more or less, and with a population increasingly connected and vibrant nationalism, the logic of relative expectations will require the Chinese Communist Party to identify means for continued growth in national power, economic and otherwise, this century.

China has articulated the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative and plans for an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). These initiatives are pronounced as promoting regional public goods and extending the principle that the peoples and governments of Asian nations should determine Asian matters. As Foot (2016) notes, China also frames its rising regional and global role as seeking a new era in superpower relations, a 21st century dynamic of reciprocal respect for national and regional interests and their global implications. Nonetheless, China sees America's role and The Pivot as playing up to other regional powers and partners, extending American influence and sowing discord among Asian nations.

In this context, North Korea remains a buffer zone for Chinese security. This thinking is ingrained at least since the Korean War, in particular for having a geographic space to forestall invasion or a hostile military (men, missiles, and aircraft) on its border. It is also ingrained in at least two other senses. The North contains many potential immigrants to other nations, at this time, let alone if there is unification. The Chinese do not need or want a mass influx. Second, a powerful North Korean military acts as a disincentive to adventurism from the United States or South Korea.

Pointedly, there is little to dispel Engel, Ryu and Shin's understanding (2016) that China has moved away from the matrix of six-party talks to a stance of "parallel tracks" in pursuing a non-nuclear peninsula (echoed by Russia). This basically means China has tacitly accepted the presence of a near-nuclear North in the face of American, Japanese, and South Korean military assets and commitments. The same would be true of Russia. The comments of some scholars (for example Cumings, 2015) overstate that the Chinese are "apoplectic" about North Korea's nukes and the threat that Japan and South Korea might go nuclear themselves in turn. The Chinese do not live by silent action.

On the contrary, today it is really the case of "more sauce for the geese". If America can move about international spaces and promote military buildups in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, why cannot China watch the squirming over the North? There should be less than total confidence China can stop Pyongyang's ambitions unless it wants to alienate North Korea. Fancy propaganda games underscore the point that China is more concerned about the demarcation at its border and who's on the other side, not about American and Korean anxieties over Northern nukes.

Furthermore, North Korea is more than a geographic buffer against invasion or a migrant problem, both of which China's handled pretty well in various historical cases over the long term. As Kydd (2015) has argued, the North is a buffer to the Chinese leadership's fear of democratization in China. (His article invites the notion that unification would require a Korea that is open to trade and other links with China and/or the gradual reduction of a U.S. military presence on the peninsula.) At present, both China and the U.S. mistrust each other enough to worry about unilaterally leaving the North or South, respectively, unguarded in the face of their rival in global power.

China fronts analogous nationalist goals between China and North Korea (unification with Taiwan vs. unification with the South) on Chinese and DPRK terms as a means to ally with DPRK (Xia and Shen, 2014) and to save face as a fellow communist nation but one that "deals" with America. The U.S. is viewed as a means to check Japanese ambitions and a scapegoat for DPRK rhetoric in this chess game. Meanwhile, China uses her alliance with the North to constitute a buffer zone on her borders, to distract and cause resource investments vs. the DPRK by the U.S., and to forestall Russian ambitions. Military and other aid to the DPRK demonstrates a PRC commitment but is predicated on the use of North Korea in China's own policy strategy. (This could explain why the aid varies and does not really effect a major improvement or decline for North Korea.) All of this adds up to maintaining division and/or "going slow" at best on unification.

Some analysts, of whom Pollack (2014) is an example, find China of two minds or indecisive about the North in terms of the Sino-American context. There may be a traditionalist vs. modernist split that opposes memory of the interests arising from the Korean War era to today's interests, the latter by which DPRK is an albatross or blood tick requiring investments that yield little fruit. The possibility of this division of opinion also does not conduce to unification. The United States can think that China's rise indicates an implied authority to tend to the North as a barrier to peace, stability, and security. However, China and its "traditionalist" or even gradualist forces will only throw such claims back on America. After all, the world's leading military superpower has responsibilities for Korean peace that indict its Northern policy too, especially in the era of THAAD.

2.2 The United States

The United States, with her ally South Korea, has a parallel story. While the United States would accept unification, the American government does not want it to occur now any more than does the Chinese government. There is growing uncertainty about the Northeast Asian region, given a rising China and a militant North -- as well as entrepreneurial states like the Philippines and smoldering nationalist impulses in Japan. Russia has been bullish on its military and political adventures in other parts of the world and might grown emboldened. The United States has posited a "pivot to Asia" that seems not to be unfolding altogether very successfully. In other ways, this pivot is a means to develop America's Asian alliances and allies within an American center, since the United States wants them to serve as buffers to China.³

³ Park (2013) provides an interesting discussion of the U.S-South Korea alliance as based on a complementarity of general interests. Throughout his discussion, one sees the vector of national interests vis-à-vis China and Japan conditioning both allies' actions and maintaining their strategic linkage in military and security relations.

The American rival to the AIIB, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), is now on the ropes, having failed passage in the last weeks of the Obama presidency; Trump and a Republican-dominated Congress are not interested, and no other “deal” has emerged of anything like these proportions. The Chinese appear interested in their own division of waterways, island proximity zones, airspace control and related matters. The South China Seas is setting American policy against cooperation in any new or novel modality. The U.S. mood under Trump is more isolationist, but there will continue to be a strong commitment to the defense of South Korea and to preventing a further nuclearized peninsula. The mood of Trump regarding North Korean nuclear weapons has been bellicose, hyperbolic, and ineffectual in its rhetoric, and Chinese temporizing is of growing “strategic impatience” and modest expressions of support and participation.

The North continues to face the consolidation of Kim III. Military power, including nuclear weapons, impresses global enemies and buys time for further economic reforms to occur. All of this increases polarization rather than conduces to unification. In terms of conventional forces alone, the North deserves to be treated as a legitimate power. As Ha (2016) notes, Kim Jong-un’s address to the Seventh Congress of the Worker’s Party of Korea amounted to a subtle announcement that in his own mind, Kim’s “monolithic leadership” has been largely consolidated. Pointedly, this leadership promotes a strategy of military-led technological and science development in order to become a major socialist power. The Kim “blueprint” references unification within a matrix of arcane ideological propaganda belied by the notion that the North should be an “international world power”. As Moon and Hwang note (2014), North Korea is a neo-Confucian state premised on its own history of “identity, dignity and status”, a monarchy (Cumings, 2015) now in its third stage of genesis.

Nothing about the security relations of China, the United States and South and North Korea predicts much beyond a type of Cold War stasis, deterrence schemes, and equilibrium without unification. As Kern (2016) analyzes, within the framework of international relations theory, as rising power and status quo power (offensive realist or power transition models of thinking) or from the perspective of geographic points of clash and evolving military technology (i.e. many American bases in the region are within range of China’s increasingly capable and prolific missiles/A2-AD capability), conflict between the U.S. and China has become more probable. China is not a democracy, and the Communist Party’s executive-centered leadership remains committed to a greater China in some form as a “core interest”. The United States, with many allies in East Asia, intends to preserve the elements of neoliberal world capitalist order against Chinese deconstructions. Chinese nationalism is stoked by Chinese leaders and might become an unavoidable accelerant in the presence of a large and impoverished domestic population, particularly in times of economic downturn. Likewise, similar arguments obtain in the U.S. regarding perceived unfair Chinese trade and business practices, in a period of isolationist, “make America great again” sentiments.

3. Barrier Two: Nationalism

Korea is today less monolithic in nationalist terms arising from shared ethnicity. North Korea is viewed by more people in the South and to a greater degree as an anachronistic state and society. South Korea’s youth lack any lived memory of Korean War and share global liberalist thinking. Koguryo claims of China at times are somewhat of a countervailing influence to ebbing Korean nationalism. Problems in the South Korea economy or “Hell Choson” as a moniker for the lot of many younger adults indicate some impetus to nationalism but not necessarily to unify. Opportunity must be taken to encourage the view of North Korea not as Other but as a people deserving respect for diversity similar to other Asians in Korea such as the Chinese to address this barrier.

Emma Campbell (2016, 2015) has coined the term “new nationalism” to speak of the impacts of globalization, generational change, and changing attitudes in South Korea on the issue of immigration. Specifically, the idea that all Koreans are one people is now not so universally held, or the meaning no longer links to the idea or goal of unification so directly. Campbell indicates the link to unification from the student pro-democracy movement is no more. (Much the same might hold in terms of the Candlelight movement, protests about Dokdo, and other issues.) Today’s younger Koreans have less memory of an “authoritarian past” or the Korean War around which to build energy for unification. The terms of the South Korean Constitution about unity with North Korea do not resonate much.

Campbell says, “South Korea’s twenty-something’s are not only part of a different generation, but also a different nation” (Campbell, 2016, p. 3). She calls their thinking “globalized cultural nationalism” (Campbell, 2016, p. 3).

Younger Koreans benefit from the sacrifices and investments of their elders, and they look to and expect Korea to be contemporary, to conform to global better and best practices, and to have a culture that respects democracy. Campbell speaks of the desire of younger Koreans for “modernity, cosmopolitanism and status” (Campbell, 2015, p. 484).

To young Koreans, the North and its understanding of the nation is an albatross and anachronism. As she notes, “. . . in the minds of young people, the concept of *uri nara*, ‘our nation’, increasingly does not include North Korea or North Koreans”, certainly not to the same extent” (Campbell, 2015, p. 490).⁴

Younger Koreans (fewer, to a lesser extent) do not subscribe to the notion that the Korean War is the seminal event for their lives (Denney, 2015). In turn, their interest in North Korea, North Koreans, and unification is less of a priority. The interest of younger adults lowers the mean and salience levels on this topic. *Yishipdae* (more of them and to a greater extent) think North Koreans belong to a different country and people, according to Denney’s findings.

Increasingly, Korean nationalism is not about being part of a homogeneous and monolithic, singular ethnicity or ethnic population in one geographic nation (Choe, 2012). With the intermarriage of Koreans to other Asian peoples, growing numbers of migrant workers and growing numbers of Koreans who take a foreign spouse, Korea is more multicultural now than ever before. These trends also are not likely to stop.

Any impetus to reunification from a desire to “unify the Korean people” has less salience now than 25 or 50 years ago. With the mobility of Korean people and the loss of historical memory of the Korean War, the idea that all Koreans must be part of one nation loses some of its centrality as a national interest in the South.⁵

One countervailing trend of some significance is the Korean antipathy to Chinese readings of ancient history, or more specifically to Chinese nationalist appropriations of Koguryo and Baekche. Some Chinese leaders are rumored to have said the two Koreas were once a part of China. There are sufficient areas of conflict at a cultural or societal level around dueling nationalist readings of history to warrant the conclusions of Kavalski (2014), but South or North Koreans for that matter would not choose to reunify over Chinese history textbooks as a prime mover.

Changing Korean nationalism likely does not characterize North Korea, or perhaps loyalist North Korean thinking. There the traditionalist arguments about Korea for Koreans that likely maintain currency, except and insofar as they are current only as the project of a totalitarian neo-Confucian state monarchy. Whereas the unity of Koreans for North Korea must occur on North Korean terms as part of its overall strategy of regime survival and of justifying its existence to North Koreans and to the world (Han, 2015), the South’s path forward with respect to this barrier is different.

What can be done with this barrier? It would be reactionary to imagine that South Korea can return to a more “traditional time”. Indeed, Koreans’ core values move with the times, and so must the self-understanding of nationalism. If “traditional nationalism” may generate less energy for unification than today’s growing multicultural and global cultural nationalist faces of Korean identity, that need not be the end of the world.

⁴ Jager (1996) discusses how dissident reunification thought and politics in the South represented reunification through the notion of a divided Korea as the by-product of U.S. imperialism and the behavior of South Korean elites. This went along with gender inequality and conservatism on the heels of romantic ideals implicitly rooted in what she calls understandings of Confucian virtue. The “loyal Korean wife” as motif underlay proto-communist appeals to unification as a way of restoring Korean people as families to a more ideal state. The kind of nationalism Campbell describes stands in contrast with the thinking of younger Koreans. They have left idealized depictions or reductionisms of cultural and social norms in later 20th century dissident thought. Younger Koreans are less interested in reunification because the narratives of more radical thought have tended to disrespect notions of gender equality, reconstructions of gender and family norms, and the like.

⁵ Kim (2015) provides a similar analysis of the opinions of younger South Koreans about North Korean defectors and migrants. They are not welcomed anymore with unanimity or in general terms. They are viewed as from a different country, one that poses a security threat to the South, and one that is so poor as to make reunification costly. The trump card or “pass” from having the same ethnicity does not carry so much weight now. This is only accentuated by the difficulties in economic terms many younger South Koreans face in their economy of late.

If more South Koreans today view North Korea somewhat as Other, they can learn to respect the needs of North Koreans, as fellow Asians as well as or if not just as ethnic brothers and sisters. Indeed, part of global culture is a basic value of respecting and appreciating diversity. It combines toleration and a sense that the needs of another group are something deserving toleration and respect. Just as Koreans begin to think and act better toward the *Chosonjok*, so they might find a kind of thinking that should extend to other immigrant groups, including their brothers and sisters from the North.

In turn, though, if this indirect line of thinking (that what the South does is of more concern for charting unification) is true, one must pay attention both to the South's "new nationalism" and to how it would frame the basis for a unified Korea in future, one that overcomes the artificial divisions of the present.

4. Barrier Three: Civil Society

Military and authoritarian regime history still determines a lot in Korea. Development of civil society in South Korean context will not look like America and deTocqueville's plethora of voluntary associations. Emerging slowly, civil society and culture still look too much to executives and to labor unions. Hierarchical networks a legacy of neo-Confucianism, Japanese imperialism and style of authority of Korean War generation leaders. Catalyzing democratic potential of Confucianism contingent on greater empowerment of women, the elderly, and younger adults. Weak reception of North Korean immigrants indicates ethnicity consciousness dimming under impacts of generational experiences/time and nationalism.

Paik (2013) sees the role of civil society or what he calls the "third party" (*chesam tangsaja*) as a "comprehensive" "project" and a key to fostering a supportive basis for gradual reunification through better and increased inter-Korean relations. His article was written in 2013, before many major events of relevance. It emphasizes the importance of creating enabling societal supports for unification, which of course entails positive social opinion and impetus for change in tandem. The same process should and can engender better East Asian cooperation more generally. Perhaps the advent of a new liberal presidency will usher in more of this thinking.

Paik's analysis is novel for its understanding that the division of the Koreas, or what he refers to as a "division system", is a construction of the 20th-21st centuries' global system, as much imposed on the two Koreas by the Korean War and armistice division, as well as global power relations, than enacted by Koreans themselves. Korean democratization in the South hastens the end of the division; North Korean *juche* and *songun* maintain or accelerate the division. Paik sees the development of civil society as encouraging leadership changes in the South to favor a greater space for gradual, rational and reasonable steps to unification overtime. Paik envisions civil society development as an indirect means to or of unification.

South Korean political energy remains overly dependent on the vision and will of its chief executive. Support for particular trajectories to unification remains leader-dependent, this despite dozens of organizations, think tanks, and organizations, including the Korean Institute for National Unification, and countless studies, articles, and proposals.

What does this mean? It means that public opinion about a particular Korean president's plan for unification remains too important. An article in 2015 noted that economic conditions, poor inter-Korean relations, and the waning popularity of former President Park had resulted in a loss of confidence in the plan for reunification as a "jackpot" or "bonanza" idea (Jeong, 2015). Park's Dresden speech, perhaps her high watermark as an international leader, had a shorter than ever shelf life. Many remember the enthusiasm for Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy and the optimism surrounding the late President Roh Moo-hyun's diplomacy.

Also consider the complementary view of gender relations embedded in 20th century dissident South Korean discourses about democracy and unification (discussed in Footnote 3). Unification of the two Koreas or the recovery of their unity as a people rests with the empowerment of women and other groups. The ideas of *injong* in relations and an ethics of care are notions about which much has been written (Rowan, 2000). While some conservatives continue to portray women's peace marches in histrionic terms or to shame their participants (the 2015 WomenCrossDMZ march as an example), their rhetoric betrays the need for women to articulate a basis for Korean society that incorporates more elements of relational *injong*. The mutuality of the Korean peoples requires advocates. If women can identify this through the reality of life today as something beyond or other than "aggressive masculinity", so much the better.

Impetus for change is needed. The liberal vs. conservative polarity does not suffice for the kind of impetus needed. The energy for unification should arise from a fundamental valuation of less powerful groups as of equal importance for Korea. This entails a new understanding of the Korean people as a democratic collective. It also entails new understandings of many sociological variables, including age and gender in relation to the sovereignty of the Korean people.

Kim Jin Ha (2009) has written about the particular genesis for much of the strength of Korean society and the South Korean nation in the antebellum period, the Korean War, and the aftermath during the developmental state period. A peculiar version of barracks discipline, rooted in a particular version of Korean-Japanese-Confucian discipline governed thinking. That version of the ideal discipline, the ideal Korean man, now stands as a barrier to the development of greater democratic energy.

Kim Minju (2008) speaks of the problem of language devaluing sub-groups of Koreans, of whom she focuses on the use of the terms *akassi* and *onni* as a way of compensating for unequal “social conditions” of younger and adult working-level women. Other research has focused status devaluation and its consequences for mature Korean women, colloquially referred to by the term *ajumma* (Rowan, 2000).

Young adults, the elderly, and women in Korea need to support unification more strongly than today. Each one has faced major changes over the last several decades, changes that continue to unfold. Each has faced status devaluations that must be transcended for the good of contemporary and future South Korean society. However, much work remains to occur. These devaluations are reflected in language as well.

Positively, the changes require a transcendence of the paradigms of the ideal person and citizen in Korea, which continues to be male, status-based, wealth-based, and age-biased in too many respects or to too great a degree.

South Koreans, liberals and conservatives who cling to a bygone paradigm of the Korean exemplary citizen limit the potential for Korean society to support unification with Other types of Koreans. The barracks soldier, the would-be *chaebol* leader, or the head of a middle class family has a particular sociological and anthropological profile: male, 30-65, person of means and education, service in the military, etc. This profile no longer suits South Korean society as a 21st century advanced nation or as a polity that aspires to unify with the North. It lacks sufficient democratic potential, even as a descriptor for males.

The type of changes that conduce to producing a society ready for unification require a deepening of the Korean practice of Confucian democracy. Transcending or deconstructing them would generate more energy and equality and freedom potentials for North Korean counterparts. What Paik talks about as the division system is often viewed crudely as a matter of the Koreas coming together. But just ending the division of the two Koreas means nothing if the groundwork does not exist for making the lives of different Korean sub-groups better.

As a related if different factor, consider the relatively lukewarm reception accorded North Korean defectors and refugees. While the national government and broader global press may make much of defections, escapes, and similar incidents, the general public seems underwhelmed. Of course, defectors and refugees provide valuable information and corroborating accounts of life inside North Korea and have shed much light on the operation of the Kim regimes, in particular as regards its totalitarian faces.

However, nothing about North Korean refugees has spawned a movement to unify or provided much impetus to civil society groups. In fact, as Kim Jiyeon (2016) analyzes survey and opinion data, the refugees are assimilated in South Korean thinking more akin to migrant workers than as lost or prodigal brothers returning to the fold. (This discussion also illustrates the changing nature of South Korean nationalism above.) Kim notes that South Koreans no longer have an “open arms” view. The inter-Korean family visits no longer strike the representative pose for this type of subject. Instead, South Koreans view Northern émigrés or defectors or escapees “as just one of many migrant groups”. Of course, Southerners do not oppose accepting defectors and refugees, and they do not mind being around them. However, there is little interest in working closely with or marrying them, according to his survey data (Kim, Jiyeon, 2016). There also is growing support for selective rather than blanket acceptance. They may also be viewed with heightened suspicion as potentially compromised when national security issues are at the forefront.

They may also be viewed as costing South Koreans money in taxes and social costs. The passage of time and adulthood of a generation with less historical memory of the Korean War have a lot of explanatory power for this reaction (Kim, Jiyeon, 2016).⁶

Immigrants tend to provide more benefits to a nation's economy than they do costs, though the structure of those costs and benefits may appear skewed to costs in the short-term of an immigrant's life cycle. Immigrants help societies facing a shortage of births and tend to occupy jobs that citizens do not want. Of course, the social costs are not insignificant, but given the relative openness of many borders, a proactive approach likely requires further development overtime.

The openness of Koreans in the South to the ongoing advancement and empowerment of women (and other groups, such as the elderly and the young) are not new issues. South Korea has a poor ranking among the OECD participants in this area. If it is discomfiting for some to realize that freedom begs equality, it may nonetheless be true. The creation of a stronger civil society requires accepting the participation of a wider circle of Koreans than male political elites. And while this is also true in every nation on earth, it remains an important if less frequently cited issue for hastening Korean unification.

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⁶ A 2015 blog post on North Korean refugees (Crossing Borders, 2015) also identified the currency of these opinions of growing lack of affinity with North Korean refugees. South Koreans see the North as a likely burden on their economy and society and as increasingly Other despite ethnic affinity given its isolationism and political dictatorship.

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