

A Pair of Chopsticks

Ju-Woo Nho

Working on my AP Macroeconomics homework in the evening, I hear my mother calling our family to eat dinner. I quickly pack up my pencil and calculator, nearly running to be the first to the dinner table. With the delicious aromas filling up the air, I glance around at the plentiful dishes—savory bulgogi, spicy doenjang-jjigae, steaming white rice topped off with crunchy kimchi—and pick up my chopsticks. As I wait for the rest of my family to arrive, I recall the first time I held a pair of wooden chopsticks in my hands. I was a five-year-old child sitting at the family dinner table. Curiosity shining in my eyes, I clumsily broke the two sticks apart, only to realize that they had split unevenly. My failure to break the chopsticks into two identical sticks caused tears to well up, and my mother had to comfort me with a hug.

Strangely, the division of South Korea and North Korea reminds me of the sticks I broke apart, so long ago. Both started as one but eventually split into two. South Korea, as a global economic and democratic leader, represents the larger wooden chopstick. North Korea, with widespread poverty and a dictatorship, illustrates the smaller chopstick. But no matter the size, the chopsticks are nothing more than two useless sticks when used separately. They must be used *together*, in one hand, in order to function properly. For that reason, I believe in the unification of South and North Korea.

Currently, South Korea is in a state of unprecedented growth and prosperity. With a GDP of \$1.619 trillion in 2018¹, South Korea is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The country's education system is known for its academic excellence and success, ranking first worldwide in 2017². I used to be asked “where did you come from?” only for people to have no idea what South Korea was. Now, with global names like Hyundai, Samsung, and LG, South Korea is renowned as a powerhouse of innovative technology. K-pop groups, such as BTS, have taken the world by storm and dominated the Billboard charts. I can proudly tell strangers of my South Korean heritage, and their eyes will light up with recognition and respect.

On the other hand, many North Korean citizens are unable to afford basic necessities, such as food and healthcare. Droughts and floods often plague the country and cause food shortages. Moreover, unlike the fair, open elections of South Korea, North Korea is under the strict rule of a dictator. There is almost no contact with the

¹ Garikipati, Ram. “S. Korea Ranks 12th in 2018 GDP Ranking.” *The Investor*, 8 July 2019, www.theinvestor.co.kr/view.php?ud=20190708000559.

² Human Rights Advocate. “The Incredible South Korean Education System.” *World Top 20 Project*, 23 Nov. 2019, worldtop20.org/the-incredible-south-korean-education-system.

foreign world, as all forms of media and information are regulated by the North Korean government.

Despite the stark difference between the two countries today, over 70 years ago, South and North Korea were once one country. Under the oppressive rule of Japan during WWII, there was no division. Even with our voices silenced, rightful names erased, women brutalized, and cultural artifacts stolen, we faced these struggles together. We fought, cried, and celebrated together. From military leaders to ordinary people, Korean activists moved as one body and bravely strove for independence.

Regardless of the passage of countless years, both South and North Korea still remember An Jung-geun's strength and Ahn Chang Ho's dedication. Right before he died, An Jung-geun said, *"After my death, I wish for my remains to be buried near Harbin Park, and then to be reburied in Korea after the country regains its sovereignty. Even while I am in heaven, I will exert every effort for the independence of Korea. When the day comes that I hear of Korea's independence, I will dance and shout 'Hurrah!'"*³ We cannot forget how, on that glorious day of independence, Korea— as one nation— let out a cry so great that we shook the heavens and the earth. In respect for the people that lost their lives fighting for a single Korea, we must remember the pride and courage with which we were once united. South Korea and North Korea have a deep history, one that ties them together forever.

So, I want to ask: when our family members are suffering and in pain, do we turn a blind eye because it is too much work to help them out? We cannot leave our Korean brothers and sisters— our family— behind. We must reach out and become stronger together. Sharing the same language and people, we long to be unified at heart. No matter the size disparity, the two chopsticks must be used together in order to eat a meal. That is why I believe that the unification of the two nations is necessary and of utmost importance. Only with reunification can both sides rise up to greatness and achieve prosperity on the whole.

Some may argue that it doesn't make sense for South and North Korea to reunite, as it would put unnecessary stress on South Korea's economy. Rather on the contrary, a combined nation would actually create a larger consumer market and strengthen the domestic economy, due to an increase in both population and land size. South Korea has advanced technology but lacks natural resources; North Korea is abundant in raw materials, such as coal, iron, seafood, and rare earth minerals. With the North's natural resources supporting the South's developed infrastructure, South Korea would no longer be as reliant on exportation and foreign countries. In return, the South would invest in

³ Yunhee, Seo. "An Junggeun's Calligraphy Work of His Final Message: Curator's Picks." *National Museum of Korea*, www.museum.go.kr/site/eng/archive/united/14965.

Northern energy and transportation sectors, providing capital to open up North Korea's economy. By doing so, the individual strengths of the two countries would be combined to instigate immense economic growth as one country. According to a study by Goldman Sachs, the unification of South and North Korea would allow for the nation to match the GDP of the G7 countries in 30 to 40 years⁴.

Moreover, reunification would lead to the dissipation of the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). South and North Korea share a border, but it is as if the distance is greater than a thousand seas, due to the strict regulations between the two countries. My parents try to visit South Korea every year, as they always miss their parents that live far away. After the Korean War, numerous families were separated by the DMZ. How much more painful can it be for family members that have been unable to reunite for decades? With unification, parents, children, siblings, and lovers would finally be able to meet each other once again. In addition, the need for the expensive maintenance of DMZ would be eliminated. Without the constant threat of rising tensions between the two countries, military spending would be significantly reduced. The money could instead be used for the development of Korea's economic, cultural, and social welfare. Although the process would be slow and difficult, unification will eventually make Korea even stronger than it was before.

With the evident benefits of becoming one country, I am eager to expedite the process of reunification. However, I remain steadfast in my belief that unification can and *must* only be achieved through peaceful means. Living in America, I have watched news reporters discuss North Korea's arsenal of nuclear missiles. From testing their weapons to issuing global threats, I am frankly ashamed at the thought of trying to instill fear in others. Unification cannot be done through force, as it would only cause more pain and death. There must never be another Korean War. We must remember that we were once family, not enemies. By raising awareness and educating ourselves, we can support democratic equality and unification with all that we have.

Ultimately, I believe that the peaceful unification of South and North Korea can and will happen. We will set an example for the rest of the world, paving the way for global peace. World peace is often touted as an admirable, yet unrealistic goal. However,

⁴ The G7 countries consist of the top developed countries in the world: the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Bernstein, Jacob. "Economic Consequences of Korean Reunification." *Investopedia*, 11 July 2018, www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/082515/will-north-and-south-korea-ever-reunite.asp.

we must realize that peace is a *choice*. The Panmunjom Declaration⁵, signed in 2018, is only the first step of a long road ahead. We will strengthen the relations between the North and the South and eventually see peace throughout the entire peninsula. Even if my words cannot reach the eyes and ears of those insurmountable political leaders, I want the world— and future generations— to see in writing what I believe. Like Yi Yuksa, I know my aspirations, hopes, and dreams will resonate within the words I write. We— the Korean-Americans, South Koreans, North Koreans, and the world— are all together on this journey to peaceful reunification.

*“Let’s plant the seed of peace in our hearts
Share our dreams of a beautiful future
Beginning here
Spreading across the world
Ending all wars and conflicts*

*Peace is a choice
We can promote it wherever we go
Because it starts with me
Begins with you
And lives on through us”*

— Ju-Woo Nho, 2018

⁵ Signed by Moon Jae-in, the President of South Korea, and Kim Jong-un, the Supreme Leader of North Korea, with the intent to bring an end to conflict on the Korean peninsula