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The Perception of the Integration of North and South Korea

Woo-Young Lee & Hayeon Lee *

Abstract: »Die Sichtweisen auf einen Zusammenschluss von Nord- und Südkorea«. This study describes South Koreans' general perceptions of the integration of North and South Korea through a survey of 500 adults living in South Korea. The following multiple-choice questions were asked: one's general ideas about the integration of North and South Korea; the type of Korean reunification which is mostly supported/opposed; the type of Korean reunification which is most probable; and the pros and cons of reunification as well as necessary factors for reunification. Furthermore, we examined the differences in the perception of Korean reunification among the subgroup based on participants' demographic information (i.e., gender, age, political orientation). The main results are as follows. First, the most representative thought on integration was "geographical integration of the Korean Peninsula," followed by "establishment of economic partnerships or communities" and "restoration of common identity." Meanwhile, there were differences among participants with regard to the detailed representation of Korean reunification. It suggests that when the attitudes toward integration of North and South Korea society are discussed, differences in the perception among people should be considered.

Keywords: Social integration, Korean reunification, integration of Korean minds.

1. Introduction

There is a growing interest in the integration of North and South Korea as the relations between the two countries has improved since the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. How could Korean reunification be possible at the sociocultural level? More importantly, how could an integration of Korean minds be possible among those who make up the integrated Korean society? To answer these

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questions, it is necessary to consider the general perception of the integration of North and South Korea among its members. The questions regarding how people perceive the integration of two Korean societies (e.g., whether various subgroups in each society – categorized, for example, by members’ demographic information – have similar or different attitudes on the Korean reunification, whether or not members of subgroups have different attitudes toward the Korean reunification, and how we can resolve the conflict among intra and intergroup difference in society) serve as the stepping stones toward the understanding of the perception of Korean reunification and give direction toward the integration of Korean minds. In this research, our major purpose is describing the perception of the Korean reunification among South Koreans.

The perceptions of Korean reunification can be understood through various dimensions, for example North and South Korean’s beliefs regarding each other (i.e., stereotypes toward one another North and South Korean or their attitudes toward the social system (e.g., political or economic system) of North and South Korea; the perceptions about the inter-Korean relations; and the attitudes and expectations regarding Korean reunification. Most previous research (e.g., Chun and Jo 2000; Hai-sook Kim 2002; Yoon and Chae 2010) focused on the stereotype and prejudice of North and South Koreans toward each other. In addition, there are representative surveys conducted annually which asked people for their perceptions and attitudes toward Korean reunification. First, the survey about Korean reunification conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification (2017) asked participants the following questions: their general attitude toward Korea reunification (“How necessary do you think Korean reunification is?”), their specific attitudes and emotional responses toward reunification (e.g., “Although North and South Koreans share a common ethnic identity, it is not necessary to construct one country”; “I am comfortable when I am thinking about the reunification”), and their behavioral intentions in relation to reunification (e.g., “I am in favor of raising taxes for the reunification”). Participants answered those questions on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all ~ 5 = very much). Participants also choose the items mostly correspondent with their opinion about the processes of Korean reunification; for example, the timeframe for reunification (“need not be unified vs. pursue by adjusting the speed vs. as soon as possible”), preferred method for reunification (“gradual unification by negotiation vs. radical unification by emergency situation vs. other”), reason for reunification (e.g., “because North and South Korean shared common ethnic identity”), and necessary conditions for reunification (e.g., “improvement of North Korea’s economic status”). The second survey is about the perception of Korean reunification, conducted by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (2018). This survey also asked participants about their general attitude toward Korean reunification (“How necessary do you think reunification between the North and South Korea?”; 1 = not at all ~ 5 = very much), followed by specific perceptions of reunification similar with the

Korea Institute for National Unification's survey on Korean reunification. They originally asked participants about their perceptions and attitudes toward a political system for an integrative society of North and South Korea (e.g., "based on the system of North Korea vs. South Korea; compromised system of North and South Korea").

The two surveys attempted to quantify attitudes toward Korean reunification in addition to some specific aspects and methods of the integration. Based on these surveys, researchers can describe and summarize the numeric data from participants and examine statistical hypotheses about the differences between participants based on their characteristics (e.g., gender, age, educational background) and the relations among variables. However, there are limitations for understanding the perceptions of various forms of Korean reunification among people and the attitudes toward it because which type of reunification is representative in people's minds cannot be verified. For example, it is not possible to identify through the above questions what South Koreans generally think the "reunification of the North and South Korea" is – whether they consider it as a geographical integration on the Korean Peninsula, the construction of one political and economic systems of Korea, or social and cultural integration of North and South Koreans. Those aspects of Korean reunification could occur independently rather than simultaneously (Cha 2000). In addition, specifically when regarding the integration of the political and social systems of the two Koreas, it is possible that respondents have different attitudes (e.g., preference, perceived feasibility, and behavioral intention) toward each process and the outcomes of Korean reunification. Therefore, in the interpretation of previous research, one should consider the possibility that each participant responded based on their own perceptions. In fact, there are in-depth analyses based on the above surveys which compared the attitudes of North and South Koreans toward Korean reunification (Kim and Choi 2012), and other research examined the effect of demographic factors on the perception of legitimacy and feasibility of Korean reunification among South Koreans (Lee 2014). Both pieces of research had the limitation that they used answers to questions about general attitudes toward Korean reunification without specifying the type and manner of reunification. In other words, it is possible to interpret these findings from various angles, such as whether differences in the region, age, or political orientation predict attitudes toward reunification, or whether variations of the attitudes are the result of differences in the perception of reunification in accordance with individual demographic factors.

In addition, the various perceptions of Korean reunification among community members are limited when constructing common themes about the integration of Korean society at the community level. Perceptions of reunification among people can be different depending on the ideology, political and economic status of individuals, and the perception of situational factors such as changes in inter-Korean relations. Hence, in order to discuss the perceptions of

reunification, it is necessary to first analyze people's various perceptions and attitudes toward those aspects (Kim 2001). Furthermore, if there are different perceptions of Korean reunification between members in society, there is the possibility of conflict between subgroups resulting from a lack of understanding for differences in perception (Kang 2004). Therefore, it is necessary for constructing the social agreement of Korean reunification to verify the concrete perceptions of inter-Korean integration by members of society and identify commonalities and differences between the perceptions that exist within each subgroup.

However, to the best of our knowledge, there has been no empirical study dealing with the various perceptions and attitudes regarding Korean reunification. In this research, we tried to understand the perception of Korean reunification and to verify whether the contents and attitudes of the perception of reunification differ in South Koreans depending on demographic variables such as age, gender, and political orientation. Specifically, we obtained a more detailed understanding of the perception of Korean reunification by asking what they generally think about reunification between North and South Korea, their attitudes toward each type of reunification (i.e., constructing one country, federation, or national union), why they support or oppose reunification, and what is required for reunification. Each question had various response options to facilitate an accurate expression of participants thought. Participants were then categorized according to their age, gender, and political orientation and we analyzed whether there were statistical differences in responses between subgroups. The following section details the methods and results of this study.

2. Participants

Five hundred people (250 female, age mean = 39.75, SD = 11.03) living in South Korea were recruited via an online survey with monetary rewards.¹ The demographic information of participants (age and gender distribution) is shown in Table 1 (Online Appendix).² The survey was conducted in March 2018, after the PyeongChang Olympics.

¹ Lee, Woo-Young; Lee, Hayeon (2019): The Perception of the Integration of North and South Korea. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. Data file Version 1.0.0, doi: 10.7802/1936.

² The Online Appendix can be found at HSR-Trans 31: <<https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.trans.31.v.01.2019>>.

3. Measures

The Perception of Korean Reunification

To understand the perception of Korean reunification, the question “What do you think the reunification of North and South Korea is?” was asked with nine possible answers. Participants selected three items which corresponded with their opinions. The nine items were as follows: (1) geographical integration on the Korean Peninsula; (2) establishment of a single political system; (3) establishment of economic communities; (4) expansion of social and cultural exchanges; (5) restoration of common ethnic identity; (6) psychological harmony between North and South Koreans; (7) South Korea’s absorption of North Korea; (8) North Korea’s absorption of South Korea; and (9) other (open-ended).

Most Preferred or Opposed Type of Reunification

To identify the most preferred or opposed type of reunification, we asked two questions: “What type of reunification do you prefer?” and “What type of reunification do you oppose?” We presented five choices for each question, from which participants selected the one that most closely matched their opinion. The choices presented were as follows: (1) establishment of a single political system based on South Korea; (2) establishment of a single political system based on North Korea; (3) establishment of a single state through a federation between North and South Korean governments; (4) a union of the nation between North and South Korea; and (5) other (open-ended).

Most Feasible Type of Reunification

To determine perceptions of the type of reunification most likely to occur, we asked: “What kind of reunification do you think is most likely happened in the current situation?” We presented five choices to the participants that were similar to the aforementioned questions (*the most preferred or opposed type of reunification*) to participants and asked them to select the one that most corresponded with their opinion.

Reasons for Supporting Reunification

To determine why participants support Korean reunification, we asked: “Why do you think North and South Korea need to be unified?” We presented nine choices, from which respondents selected the three that were closest to their opinions. The views presented were as follows: (1) because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity’; (2) to eliminate the threat of war; (3) to make Korea a

stronger country; (4) to resolve the problems of separated families; (5) to improve the life of North Koreans; (6) to contribute to world peace; (7) because the majority of Koreans wants reunification; (8) for no particular reason; and (9) other (open-ended).

Reasons for Opposing Reunification

To determine why participants oppose Korean reunification, we asked: “Why do you think the two Koreas should not be unified?” We presented nine choices, from which respondents selected the three that were closest to their opinions. The views presented were as follows: (1) North and South Korea have had different histories for too long; (2) there is no possibility of war between North and South Korea; (3) reunification interferes with South Korea becoming a stronger country; (4) aversion to the North Korean regime; (5) the financial burden of the South Koreans for reunification; (6) the state of division is favorable to maintaining power-order of the world; (7) many people do not want reunification; (8) no particular reason; and (9) other (open-ended).

Necessary Factors for Reunification

To determine the factors necessary for reunification, we asked: “What do you think is necessary for reunification?” We presented nine choices, from which respondents selected the three that were closest to their opinions. The views presented were as follows: (1) improvement in North Korea’s political/economic situation; (2) improvement in South Korea’s political/economic situation; (3) improvement in South Koreans’ perceptions of reunification; (4) improvement in North Koreans’ perceptions of reunification; (5) establishment of peaceful relations between North and South Korea; (6) international agreement by China, the United States, and so on; (7) expansion of political and economic exchanges between North and South Korea; (8) expansion of inter-Korean social/cultural/interpersonal exchanges; and (9) other (open-ended).

Once the responses to the main questions were completed, participants responded to a question on their political orientation (1 = liberal to 7 = conservative). The survey ended with questions about their place of birth, age, occupation, and academic background.

4. Results

Demographic Information of Participants

Of the participants, 38.8% were from Seoul and 16.4% from the capital area (Gyeonggi). Other major cities (Busan, Daegu, and Incheon) followed with 6 to

7% each. There was no statistically significant difference in cross-analysis in place of birth based on gender and age group ($p > .282$).

The mean (M) of the political orientation of participants was 3.63 and standard deviation (SD) was 1.40. There was no statistically significant difference in the level of political orientation by age group, $p = .095$. Male responses ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.45$), however, indicated they were more conservative than females ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.31$), $F(1,498) = 14.31$, $p < .001$. Meanwhile, we checked the score distribution to form a subcategory of respondents' overall political orientation. The percentages for liberal (one to three-point response), moderate (four-point response), and conservative (five to seven-point response) were 43.5%, 33.8%, and 22.7%, respectively. There was no statistically significant difference in the response rates for liberal, moderate, and conservative orientations by age group, $p = .481$, but there was a statistically significant difference in the response rates for liberal, moderate, and conservative orientations by gender, $\chi^2(2) = 19.63$, $p < .001$. Specifically, the response rates for liberal, moderate, and conservative political orientations among males were 43.9%, 45.2%, and 67.8%, respectively. Among females, the response rates for liberal, moderate, and conservative political orientations were 56.1%, 54.8%, and 32.2%, respectively. There was a gap between males and females in the response rate for the conservative orientation.

In the analysis of main questions, we described the results of participants' overall responses, as well as whether the response rates and details varied according to age group (the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s), gender (male, female), and political orientation (liberal, moderate, conservative). (See Appendix for the full results of this question and the results for age group, gender, and political orientation.)³ To compare the response rates according to age group, gender, and political orientation, a chi-square test (and a chi-square test for multiple responses) was performed based on the question.

The Perception of Korean Reunification

The most common idea associated with Korean reunification was the "end of geographical division on the Korean Peninsula" (average 57.5%), followed by "establishment of an economic partnership or community" (average 47.1%) and "restoring the common ethnic identity of the two Koreas" (average 48.4%). The differences in response rates by age, gender, and political orientation were statistically significant, age group $\chi^2(24) = 36.40$, $p = .050$, gender $\chi^2(8) =$

³ To determine the difference in response rates in the cross-analysis according to age group, gender, and political orientation, responses of "other" and "60s" age group were excluded because of their small number. A small number of each cell in chi-square analysis leads to low validity of results when 20% or more of the total number of possible frequencies is less than five. The "other" response rate in this survey was 1.1% on average and 0.2~3.0% in each question.

17.76, $p = .023$, political orientation $\chi^2(16) = 34.79$, $p = .004$. Descriptions of each analysis are as follows.

First, by age group, those in their 20s thought of reunification as the “end of geographical division on the Korean Peninsula” (average 56.0%), the “establishment of a single political community” (average 46.0%), and the “expansion and integration of social and cultural exchanges” (average 46.0%). The response rates were low for “restoration of common ethnic identity” (average 39.0%) and “establishment of economic communities” (40.0%). Meanwhile, for those in their 30s-50s, the second and third most common responses were “restoration of common ethnic identity” (average 51.5%) and “establishment of economic communities” (average 49.5%). This can be interpreted as a reduced awareness in people in their 20s of “restoration of common ethnic identity” or “establishment of economic communities” as compared to those in their 30s-50s.

Next, by gender, the most frequent response for both males and females was “end of geographical division on the Korean Peninsula” (average 58.0%); however, there were differences in their second and third most frequent responses. Males responded in the order of “establishment of economic communities” (average 49.6%) and “restoration of common ethnic identity” (average 46.8%), while females responded in the order of “restoration of an ethnic identity” (average 50.8%) and “expansion of social and cultural exchanges” (average 49.6%).

Next, by political orientation, the response rates for liberal, moderate, and conservative groups were all in the order of “end of geographical division” (average 58.9%), “restoration of common ethnic identity” (average 49.2%), and “expansion of social and cultural exchanges” (average 47.7%). For “psychological harmony between North and South Koreans,” however, the response rate was lower in conservatives (20.3%) than in liberals and moderates (average 36.5%). For “South Korea’s absorption of North Korea” (35.6%) and “North Korea’s absorption of South Korea” (9.3%), the response rate was higher in conservatives than in liberals and moderates (24.6% and 2.6%, respectively). Thus, conservatives are less likely to recognize reunification as serving the purpose of “psychological harmony between North and South Koreans” than liberals or moderates, whereas they are more likely to perceive reunification as the absorption of one country by the other.

Most Preferred Type of Reunification

The most preferred type of reunification was “establishment of a single political system based on South Korea” (average 56.9%). The second highest was “establishment of a single state through a federation between North and South Korean governments” (average 25.6%). In this analysis, the difference in response rates by age group was statistically significant, $\chi^2(9) = 17.26$ and p

= .045. Specifically, for those in their 20s, the response rate for “establishment of a single political system based on South Korea; (2) establishment of a single political system based on North Korea” (average 71.7%) was more than three times that of the second highest, “establishment of a single state through a federation between North and South Korean governments ” (average 18.2%). However, for those in their 30s-50s, the response rate for “establishment of a single political system based on South Korea” (average 52.0%) was about half that of the total responses. The response rate for “establishment of a single state through a federation between North and South Korean governments” (average 28.1%), which was half that of the most frequent response, ranked second. This means that the most preferred type of reunification was almost the same among those in their 20s (South Korean system-based unification). However, people in their 30s-50s can be interpreted as having relatively diverse opinions (federal system, national union, etc.) on Korean reunification.

Most Opposed Type of Reunification

The most opposed type of unification was “establishment of a single political system based on North Korea” (average 76.4%). In this analysis, the difference in response rates by gender and political orientation was significant (gender $\chi^2(3) = 8.01, p = .046$, political orientation $\chi^2(6) = 12.58, p = .050$). By gender, for males and females alike, the primary response was “establishment of a single political system based on North Korea.” However, females opposed this type of reunification more vociferously (average 81.9%) than males (average 71.6%). The analysis based on political orientation showed that the primary response for liberal, moderate, and conservative was “establishment of a single political system based on North Korea.” However, liberals (81.8%) had a higher response rate for “establishment of a single political system based on North Korea” than conservatives (average 71.8%). In other words, female and liberal South Koreans are most likely to be opposed to reunification based on the North Korean regime.

Most Feasible Type of Reunification

The type of reunification respondents considered most likely was “establishment of a single state through a federation between North and South Korean governments” (average 33.7%). This was followed by “a union of the nation between North and South Korea” (average 30.9%), and “establishment of a single political system based on South Korea” (average 30.7%). For this question, there was no statistically significant difference in response rates by age, gender, or political orientation, $ps > .118$. Thus, South Koreans see these ways of reunification as equally feasible regardless of their age, gender, or political orientation.

Reasons for Supporting Reunification

The highest response rate among the reasons why the two Koreas should achieve reunification was “to eliminate the threat of war” (average 78.6%). This was followed by “because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity’” (average 53.1%), and “to make Korea a stronger country” (average 52.6%). Analysis of the difference in response rates by age group showed that the overall difference was not significant, $p = .200$. However, for the answer “because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity,’” those in their 20s (average 40.0%) showed a lower response rate than those in their 30s-50s (average 57.4%). This is a result consistent with the response rate for “restoration of common ethnic identity,” which was lower for those in their 20s than in their 30s-50s.

Differences in response rates by gender and political orientation were statistically significant (gender $\chi^2(8) = 18.41, p = .018$, political orientation $\chi^2(16) = 32.34$ and $p = .009$). A summary of each analysis is as follows. First, for males and females, the same responses ranked first to third: “to eliminate the threat of war,” “because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity,’” and “to make Korea a stronger country.” Meanwhile, for “to resolve the problems of separated families,” the response rate of females (average 44.8%) was higher than that of males (average 36.0%). The answer “for no particular reason,” had a higher response rate for men (average 6.4%) than women (average 2.0%). Second, the analysis based on political orientation also showed that liberals, conservatives, and moderates had the same order of responses from first to third. However, for “to eliminate the threat of war,” moderates (average 86.3%) had a higher response rate than conservatives (average 68.6%). On the contrary, for “to improve the life of North Koreans,” conservatives (average 37.3%) had a higher response rate than moderates (average 23.8%).

Reasons for Opposing Reunification

The highest response rate among the reasons why the two Koreas should not achieve reunification was for “aversion to the North Korean regime” (average 85.4%). This was followed by “the financial burden of the South Koreans for reunification” (average 81.1%) and “North and South Korea have had different histories for too long” (average 66.7%). In this question, the difference in response rates by political orientation was statistically significant, $\chi^2(16) = 34.84, p = .004$. Specifically, the answer “aversion to the North Korean regime” has a higher response rate among liberals (average 90.2%) than conservatives (average 77.1%). As for “there is no possibility of war between North and South Korea,” moderates (average 14.9) had a higher response rate than liberals (average 6.1%). Most liberal South Koreans oppose reunification because of an “aversion to the North Korean regime” and the percentage of people who think “there is no possibility of war” is relatively low.

Based on the fact that the response rate for the top three answers was approximately 78%, we could infer that reasons for why the two Koreas should not achieve reunification were relatively converged. Also, the third most common answer, “North and South Korea have had different histories for too long,” can be seen as contradicting the second most common answer, “because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity’” among pro-reunification reasons. Although South Koreans believe they share a common identity with North Koreans, they simultaneously feel an aversion to North Korea because of the fact that they have experienced different historical events over the past 70 years.

Necessary Factors for Reunification

The highest response rate for factors required for unification was for “improvement in North Korea’s political/economic situation” (average 67.3%). This was followed by “establishment of peaceful relations between North and South Korea” (average 47.4%) and “expansion of political and economic exchanges between North and South Korea” (average 37.8%). In this question also, the differences in response rates by age group, gender, and political orientation were all statistically significant: age group $\chi^2(24) = 47.28, p = .003$; gender $\chi^2(8) = 37.04, p < .001$; and political orientation $\chi^2(16) = 28.61, p = .027$. Descriptions of each analysis are as follows.

First, by age group, those in their 20s responded in the order: “improvement in North Korea’s political/economic situation” (average 78.0%), “improvement in North Koreans’ perceptions of reunification” (average 48.0%), and “international agreement by China, the United States, and so on” (average 45.0%). Response rates for “establishment of peaceful relations between North and South Korea” (average 41.0%) and “expansion of political and economic exchanges” (average 28.0%) were relatively low. Among those in their 30s-50s, the following were the second and third highest responses: “establishment of peaceful relations” (average 49.5%) and “expansion of political and economic exchanges” (average 41.1%). In sum, there was a difference between those in their 20s and those in their 30s-50s with regard to what was considered a requirement for reunification. Those in their 20s were relatively more concerned about changes in North Korea (political/economic situation and improved perceptions) than people in their 30s-50s, who were concerned with inter-Korean exchanges and improved relations between two nations.

Next, by gender, males and females both ranked “improvement in North Korea’s political/economic situation” (average 66.8%) first, with the second highest response being “establishment of peaceful state relations” (average 49.0%). However, there were differences in the third highest response: while for men it was “international agreement by China, the United States, and so on” (39.6%), it was “expansion of political and economic exchanges” (40.8%) for women. In addition, women (36.0%) had a higher response rate than men (22.4%) for

“expansion of inter-Korean social/cultural/interpersonal exchanges.” In other words, women consider direct exchanges between the two Koreas a requirement for reunification.

Next, by political orientation, liberals, moderates, and conservatives all ranked the following first and second: “improvement in North Korea’s political/economic situation” (average 66.9%) and “establishment of peaceful relations” (average 48.7%). However, there was a difference in the third highest response, with liberals responding with “expansion of political and economic exchanges” (average 43.5%), moderates responding with “improvement in North Koreans’ perceptions of reunification” (average 38.1%), and conservatives responding with “international agreement by China, the United States, and so on” (average 42.4%). In addition, for “expansion of inter-Korean social/cultural/interpersonal exchanges,” liberals (average 35.0%) showed a higher response rate than moderates and conservatives (average 23.9%). In sum, liberals consider direct inter-Korean exchanges (political/economic, social/culture/interpersonal) the main requirement for reunification when compared to other political orientations.

5. Discussions

In this study, we sought to understand the general perceptions of Korean reunification and verify whether these perceptions varied according to demographic variables such as age, gender, and political orientation. We surveyed 500 adults living in South Korea about their ideas of “Korea reunification,” their attitudes toward each type of reunification, and reasons for favoring/opposing reunification and as well as the requirements for it. We provided multiple choices for each question, allowing them to choose more than one. By doing so, we examined South Koreans’ perceptions of integration between North and South Korea in more specific terms.

The main results of this study are summarized as follows. First, with regard to the general idea of reunification, “end of geographical division on the Korean Peninsula” was the dominant answer regardless of age, gender, and political orientation. However, people in their 30s-50s mostly chose “restoration of common ethnic identity” and “establishment of economic partnerships or communities” as Korean reunification, but those in their 20s showed relatively low levels for this perception. This result was similar to the reasons given for favoring reunification. One of the reasons for favoring reunification, “because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity,’” had a lower response rate for those in their 20s than those in their 30s-50s. This suggests that South Koreans in their 20s actually care less about the common ethnic identity of the North and South Korea than those in their 30s-50s.

Meanwhile, the most preferred type of reunification was that based on the South Korean system. Those in their 20s had a response rate over 70% while those in their 30s-50s showed a rate of around 50%. The rest of those in their 30s-50s preferred other types of reunification, such as the federal system (around 28%) or the national union (around 14%). This suggests that different age groups have different preferences for reunification models. Meanwhile, the type of reunification South Koreans most strongly oppose is that based on the North Korean regime. While females and liberals tended to show the highest response rates in this regard, more than 70% of all respondents were against unification based on the North Korean system. Also noteworthy is that, unlike the type of reunification participants most preferred or opposed, the most feasible type of reunification showed an even response rate around 30% for the federation, national union, and South Korean system-based reunification. There were also no differences in response rates based on age, gender, or political orientation for the most feasible type of reunification. Various interpretations are possible with regard to this. The assessment of the feasibility of a particular event may depend on the circumstances or social context in which the actual event is occurring rather than on the demographic factors of an individual. It may also depend on how members access relevant information about the event. Therefore, future research should examine the factors that affect the perceived feasibility of Korean reunification and suggest how an agreement between various perceptions of Korean reunification among the society members could be made.

Finally, on why people supported or opposed Korea reunification, the most popular reason for the support of reunification was “to eliminate the threat of war”; for the opposition, it was “aversion to the North Korean regime.” Also noteworthy is that the second reason for supporting Korean reunification was “because we are one group as ‘Han-ethnicity’” and the third reason for opposing Korean reunification was “North and South Korea have had different histories for too long.” This suggests that South Koreans simultaneously experience alienation and familiarity with regard to North Korea; they are conscious of the different historical experiences since the division even though they recognize that they shared common in-group identity. Expanding on this, when emphasizing the reason for reunification, it is necessary to stress the common ethnic identity between North and South Koreans as well as accurately identifying the differences in historical and cultural experiences in order to reduce their aversion to each other. In other words, for an integrated society and culture, it is necessary for the people from the two countries to understand and respect the differences among each other.

In sum, regarding South Koreans’ general perceptions of integration of North and South Korea, it was confirmed that there were differences in how people think of reunification and the belief toward specific aspects of reunification depending on age, gender, and political orientation. Future research is

necessary to expand the results of this study to include teenagers and senior citizens in South Korea as well as North Korea. Also, it is possible to analyze longitudinal data to verify whether perceptions of North and South Korean integration are maintained or changed at various time points depending on the rapidly changing situation between the two Koreas. In addition, while this study focused on the perceptions of Korean reunification, future studies could further focus on the interpretation of inter-Korean relations (hostile rivalry and antagonism vs. friendly partner for cooperation, governance, support, or assistance vs. partner with equal status and common identity) as well as check the details of mutual recognition and attitudes toward each other. Given the fact that the perceptions of integration may vary depending on the interpretation of inter-Korean relations or the influence of mutual recognition and attitudes between the South and North, identifying the content of perceptions and verifying the correlations among various factors could be the focus of future research.

Furthermore, in addition to demographic factors and political orientation, it is necessary to seek the psychological variables which affect the perception of integration of North and South Korea as well as other related attitudes. By exploring individual differences that consist of political attitudes (e.g., universal values; Kim, Park, and Park 2015; Schwartz, Caprara and Vecchione 2010) or level of common in-group identity between two countries (e.g., 'Han-ethnicity' identification; Yang 2009), it is possible to suggest a direction that allows members of society to form a shared belief about Korea reunification. Universal values (Schwartz 1992, 1994), for example, which represent the general beliefs regarding the desirable end states (e.g., benevolence, universalism, power, achievement) can be seen to affect the perceptions of the integration of North and South Korea. It can also be inferred that one's general ideas about and preference of/opposition to a certain type of reunification will change depending on the level of common in-group identity between the North and South Korea. We can predict that with high levels of identification on the common in-group identity ('Han-ethnicity') of North and South Koreans, people will more prefer the form of reunification based on a single country or political and social system. Future studies need to verify the effectiveness of these psychological variables in recognition of the integration of North and South Korea.

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