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Growing Apart from North Korea? Assessing the Dynamics of Identity Development in South Korea

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Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

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ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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SOCIOLOGIA
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Department of History

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Agradecimento

Aos meus pais que possibilitaram todo o meu percurso acadêmico e a todos os amigos (as) que, durante meses, ouviram as minhas preocupações, deram sugestões e, principalmente, fizeram questão de lembrar-me das minhas capacidades e incentivaram-me a terminar este capítulo: o meu mais sincero obrigada, sem vocês nada disto seria possível.

Resumo

As atuais dinâmicas de nacionalismo na Península Coreana constituem um caso único na esfera internacional em que, apesar de haver um passado partilhado com história, língua, tradições e cultura comuns, a inserção da Coreia do Sul na cena global criou um distanciamento da Coreia do Norte. A exibição de bandeiras sul-coreanas, a participação ativa em organizações internacionais e o estilo de vida *fast-paced* de Seul leva-nos a questionar se estas duas nações ainda são compatíveis uma com a outra ou se as sete décadas de divisão se revelaram mais impactantes do que o antecipado. A presente dissertação examina as dinâmicas da sociedade Sul-Coreana contemporânea e, através da análise de inquéritos nacionais e de uma investigação qualitativa aprofundada, este estudo investiga a emergência de uma identidade nacional exclusiva à Coreia do Sul e questiona o seu impacto na disposição nacional de unificação. Os resultados finais argumentam que a globalização teve um papel fundamental na reformulação das narrativas de identidade nacional no Sul e levou à criação de uma forma exclusiva de "self" que não só exclui o Norte, como também se constrói em oposição a este, apresentando-se assim como a Coreia avançada, moderna e desenvolvida. As conclusões desta investigação contribuem de forma frutuosa para o debate sobre nacionalismo no nosso mundo contemporâneo bem como oferecem uma visão atualizada das relações entre as duas Coreias e a possibilidade de unificação.

Palavras-chave: Coreia do Sul, Identidade Nacional, Globalização, Unificação.

Abstract

The ongoing panorama of nationalism in the Korean Peninsula constitutes a unique and never-seen-before case in the international arena where, despite a long-shared past with common history, language, traditions and culture, the insertion of South Korea into the global sphere seems to have separated the South from identification with the North. The display of South Korean flags, the active participation in International Organizations and the fast-paced lifestyle of Seoul leads one to question if these two nations are still compatible with one another or if the seven decades of division have proven to be more important than anticipated. This dissertation examines the current dynamics of South Korean society and, through the analysis of national surveys and thorough qualitative research, this study investigates the emergence of a South Korean national identity and questions its impact on the national willingness to unify. The final results argue that globalization has had an important role in reshaping the narratives of national identity within the South and has led to the creation of an exclusive form of 'self' that not only excludes the North, but constructs itself in opposition to their northern counterparts, hence presenting South Korea as the advanced, modern and developed Korea. The conclusions of this research provide fruitful contributions to the debate of nationalism in our contemporary world as well as it formulates an updated insight into inter-Korean relations and future unification processes.

Keywords: South Korea, National Identity, Globalization, Unification

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the era of tensions between the two antagonistic power blocs, the United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union, gave rise to a new international setting characterized by the ideological division of liberal economics versus communism where the distribution of power has forever shaped the dynamics of Korea and culminated in the separation of the country into two distinct nations: the communist regime of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Despite high levels of disagreement, the South Korean Government was never content with the separation of the country and, since the ceasefire of the Korean War (1950-1953), its national Constitution has proclaimed the eventual unification and restoration of Korea as the foremost political goal as "South Korean's antagonism against North Korea is mainly targeted at its Communist regime and should be distinguished from their attitudes toward people living in North Korea, they have had a longstanding belief in ethnic homogeneity, which drives them to consider North Koreans as part of 'one single nation'." (Han; Jang, 2016, p.111).

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1984) tell us that, when facing hostilities that undermine the longstanding social standards, societies tend to resort to their shared and collective identity in order to protect their values and unity. Respectively, following the occupation and Japanese protectorate (1910-1945), Koreans saw their homogenous identity and culture being threatened and, as a response to this political instability, *Danil Minjok*, which directly translates into homogeneous ethnic group, emerged and developed into an ethnic nationalist discourse centered around the racial purity and blood ties of its population, strongly emphasizing that the Korean peninsula has been the home of their ancestors and, for more than four thousand years, Koreans have shared a common language, ancestry, history and cultural practices. This understanding of ethnic homogeneity has been the foundation for unification discourses, especially in South Korea where various administrations have stated that, irrespective of their differences in ideology and political systems, "they [the nations] must unify because they are brothers, they are fellow Koreans, sharing common origins and descent: they form, across the most heavily militarized border in the World, one ethnic community." (Lee, 2009, p.8).

Nonetheless, while this emphasis on ethnic homogeneity and national pride are, and have been, present in political discourses and, consequently, in the mind of South Koreans, recent data shows that there has been a growing disassociation from identification with North

Koreans. Notwithstanding their shared cultural heritage, history, language, traditions and symbols, South Koreans are currently displaying unprecedented levels of indifference towards their counterparts in the North and, consequently, the need for unification has significantly decreased. According to studies developed by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) and the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), the need for unification has dropped by over 15% from 2007 to 2021, falling to the lowest percentage that has ever been recorded. This disregard for matters that concern the North has been particularly present among the younger generations of society who grew up in a completely different environment and consequently, no longer view North Koreans as members of the same nation.

While there already exists a vast literature concerning the matters of unification and deteriorating attitudes towards North Koreans on behalf of the population of the South, there remains a gap in establishing a link between these two topics, this being said, the present dissertation aims to analyze South Koreans' perception of national identity and demonstrate how, over the last decades, South Korea has made notable efforts to move towards the core of the world stage and, consequently, emerged as a powerful actor with a distinguished global position which ultimately exerted pressure and influenced South Korea's perception of 'self' and identity. The present work argues that, through recent globalization processes that characterize the last decades, South Korea has adopted the standardized Western values of capitalism, consumerism and multiculturalism thus developing a separate national identity defined by those same principles, which inevitably resulted in alienation from the North and became an enormous obstacle for the feasibility of unification. More specifically, this study aims to analyze two elemental themes: firstly, it aims to discern if the traditional narrative of ethnic homogeneity continues to shape South Koreans' construction of self and, secondly, if the presence of such is found to be diminished, we will evaluate the implications of such shift on the eventual possibility of unification with North Koreans.

Through the elaboration of this dissertation, it is intended to demonstrate that, although many South Korean governments have expressed willingness and political interest in pursuing peaceful unification with the North, the population of the South is experiencing the development of an exclusionary form of national identity, expressed through various generations of society, that challenge the traditional discourses of ethnic homogeneity. It is equally expected to illustrate that, consequently, the emergence of this singular South Korean identity represents a great obstacle to the possibility of eventual unification as the South Korean population is currently losing interest and distancing themselves from the North.

This being said, the elaboration of the present dissertation is centered around the themes of nationalism in South Korea, thus seeking to examine the following aspects: (1) to what extent does the idea of a shared Korean identity with the North still persist within the mind of South Koreans and (2) in which way does such impacts on the discourse and potential outcomes of unification? Once the main objectives of this study were established, a formal research question was formulated and, accordingly, the present study aims to answer the following questions:

Is the World witnessing the emergence of a new South Korean identity?

What are the elements that compose this new South Korean identity?

Does this new identity have any impact on the willingness to unify?

Chapter 2 - Theoretical framework

2.1. Constructing Nationalism and National Identities

For many decades, scholars have dedicated themselves to the pursuit of defining not only nations but also sought to understand the connotations behind national identity and sense of belonging. Accordingly, for one to dwell into the complex case of national identity in the Korean peninsula, it remains fundamental to carefully analyze the existing literature around the definitions of identity within the national setting. Hence, this next chapter aims to encapsulate the existing knowledge on national identity and, simultaneously, situate the Korean case within such discussions.

In our contemporary world, there is no political or social force stronger than group identity built upon the idea of *the* nation (Smith, 1971). While academics differ among themselves regarding the definitions, theories and types of national identity, there is now a common understanding that the concept of nations is relatively recent as the modern conception of nation-state emerged with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the end of the Thirty Years War, which recognized the establishment of sovereignty to individual states, providing these newly-founded states with the authority to regulate and govern their own political affairs without the interference of any external influence. While recent, the modern concept of nation rules our contemporary world and, where territorial boundaries of states once defined political and national identification, the international sphere is now divided into nations, whose definition varies in accordance with the contending schools of thought. When analyzing how and why nations come into being, the theoretical debate is centered around the four paradigms of nationalism, namely, perennialism, primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism.

Among the theories of nationalism, *Primordialism* is essentially defined by its' sociobiological character as it places a tremendous relevance on the belief that the origins of nations can be traced back to pre-modern ethnic communities and that such identities are fixed, ancient and natural. Socio-biologists and anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1973) and Edward Shils (1957) argue that nations are natural units of human organization built upon primordial attachments, these being either biological or cultural ties that are not subject to change, such as birth, territory, common ancestry, and community. While deriving nationalism from ethnic and blood ties can offer, in part, an explanation for long-term attachments to one's nation and cultural bounds, this theory was quickly abandoned as scholars began to recognize how the emphasis on fixed elements of life neglect the social and cultural changes to which

individuals and, consequently, these attachments, are subject to, which enables communities to have multiple identities that mutate and are socially constructed (Smith, 1971).

Adopting a different perspective, the paradigm of *Perennialism* is defended by scholars who depict nations as immemorial or perennial, this meaning that, whether or not nations are natural, they are a form of social organization that has been a feature of human society since time immemorial as “They [nations] are one of the basic forms of human association and identity recorded throughout history. They emerge and decline, come and go, but they are to be found in every age and continent.” (Hastings, 1997). Despite its arguments, this theory was, as primordialism, quickly abandoned as it can be easily refuted by comparing pre-modern societies with our contemporary communities, which leads one to certainly observe how much nations have progressed and developed.

The following theories take on quite a different perspective, while the previous two paradigms were built upon the foundation that nations precede the modern movement, both *Modernism* and *Ethno-symbolism* are implicitly constructed under the understanding that national identities and, consequently, nationalism, are relatively recent processes, from the XVIII century forwards, and therefore are the product of the modern constructions of capitalism, industrialism and urbanization rather than acquired through biological descent or perennial traditions (Smith, 1971).

The *Modernist* approach to nationalism is set under the premise that, as aforementioned, nations have developed under the particular modern context of the aftermath of the French Revolution (Gellner, 1983), where growing innovation and industrialization led to socio-economic and political changes that consequently resulted in the development of a high culture where, within the elites, individuals communicated and transferred knowledge to simplify mass production. According to Gellner (1983), who is one of the most influential scholars of this school of thought, the shift in the national and international setting, as well as the development of a common high culture, enhanced the idea of community, hence strengthening national unity and nationalism. This perspective diverges completely from those previously mentioned as the high culture that defines nations is something that must be learned rather than natural, “the imperative of nationalism, its roots, not in human nature as such, but in a certain kind of now pervasive social order. Contrary to popular and even scholarly belief, nationalism does not have any very deep roots in the human psyche.” (Gellner, 1983, p.24). In addition to this perspective that nations develop within the particular context of industrialization, the modernist paradigm is also composed of scholars who believe that, albeit built upon modern context, nations are invented or imagined concepts where members of the community share a common belonging

without ever meeting one another. This perspective was developed by Benedict Anderson (1983) in which Anderson emphasizes the existence of nations as imagined political communities that are inherently limited in capacity and sovereignty, which is not to say that the nation is false or fictionalized but rather imagined in the sense that its' creation and legitimization derives from its own authority to predetermine which factors are considered as representatives of the nation, such as language, traditions, borders and citizenship, which, in itself, is already a legitimizing tool as the population comes together to form a community that, irrespective of their differences, share a common and unifying trait: their national identity (Smith, 1971).

Lastly, contrary to the previous perennialist paradigms, that define nations as entities that have existed throughout history, and modernist theories that defend the existence of nations as products of the transformation from traditional to modern societies, scholars like Anthony Smith (1971) fall under the premises of *ethno-symbolism* which believes that while “The majority of present-day nations emerged in the last two centuries, both the concept and the nation, and some well-known examples of national communities and national sentiments long predated the advent of modernity.” (Smith, 2007, p.185). Emerging as a critical position against modernism, Smith (1971) tells us that the formation of nations cannot be understood without its pre-existing ethnic components, this meaning that nations are formed over long periods of time and are based on ethnic ties and sentiments towards traditions that predate the formal formation of the nation. For ethno-symbolics, ethnic communities, or *ethnies*, play a fundamental role in providing the basis for the emergence and legitimization of nations and can be defined as a named human population with a common myth of descent, shared historical memories or more elements of a common culture, a link with a historic territory or ‘homeland’ and a sense of solidarity between each other (Smith, 1971). Emphasizing the importance of historical memories and traditions in arousing collective emotions and ensuring cultural differentiation which, consequently, determines self-definition as a national community, ethno-symbolism argues that nations are thus centered around pre-existing, and often modern, ethnic cores and values.

While the understanding of these theories proves to be beneficial in discerning *when* and *what* makes a nation, one must equally analyze *who* makes the nation where, by identifying the categories of nationalism, we can advance which are the required elements that qualify for membership within a nation. Hans Kohn (2005) was the first scholar to introduce the dichotomist model of determining who belongs to the national unit by establishing a distinction between *Civic* and *Ethnic nationalism*.

In Kohn's view, Civic Nationalism arose in the West and it is a model that defines national belonging based on civic conceptions, this meaning that one can be a citizen of a nation irrespective of ethnicity, color, religion, gender or language. The civic nation places a great emphasis on its long and shared political history and legal-political equality among its members, accordingly, it tends to have an inclusive and liberal approach to national identity where belonging to the nation is open to anyone who is willing to share its values. Contrary to this *jus solis* approach to identity, the ethnic model is essentially a non-Western perspective that assumes the creation of a community based on the continuity of descent or *jus sanguinis*, the law of blood (Kohn, 2005). Deemed as illiberal and irrational, an ethnic nation is defined by language, religion, customs and traditions where belonging to the nation is granted not through political rights, as the Western model that values the role of institutions and laws, but from common descent and pre-existing ethnic conditions such as vernacular language and traditions (Smith, 1991). Other scholars have chosen to adopt disparate approaches to the study of national identities, for example, Hjern (1998) argues that, in addition to Civic and Ethnic Nationalism, individuals can construct a collective identity either through Multiple Nationalism, which represents a combination of both *Civic* and *Ethnic* nationalism, or have a weak sense of national identity through Pluralistic Nationalism where neither components are deemed as relevant.

While Kohn's ideas have set the base for the discussions around nationalism, this simplistic dichotomy between civic and political *versus* ethnic and cultural nationalism has proven to be exceptionally flawed as no nation is ever truly built solely upon either model, contrarily, nations are greatly influenced by both civic and ethnic components and, as Smith (1991) emphasizes, sometimes territorial characteristics predominate while other nations might prioritize vernacular elements. Simply put, one can say that the identity-building process is not linear among nations as different experiences lead to different outcomes.

Accordingly, as we have established the basis for understanding the elemental characteristics of defining national identity, we can now focus on the particular context of Korea and, in particular, the following subchapter will provide a more in-depth understanding of the construction of Korean national identity throughout history.

2.2. Defining Korean Nationalism

As we have seen, the creation of a collective identity among individuals is highly built upon the idea of belonging to a common descent and continuity from a historic shared past where, undoubtedly, Korea is not an exception. Following the perspective of invented traditions proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1984), Korean mythology represents the foundation for its history as a nation and every October 3rd, Koreans from both the North and the South, come together to celebrate the establishment of the first Korean ancient state, *Gojoseon*, in 2333 CE by the national figure and Father of the Korean People, *Dangun* (Young, 2000). Tracing back to the national myth, *Dangun* is believed to have spread its people to the peninsula south of China and, throughout centuries, this substantially big community has quietly lived in the territory that would be named Korea. It remains crucial to fathom the background of Korea's mythology as it represents an important characteristic of Korean national identity and introduces us to the relevance of ethnic nationalism in this country. Under the figure of *Dangun*, Koreans have perceived themselves as one homogeneous ethnic community united by blood and common descent where belonging to the nation is exclusively dependent on ancestry and conformance with traditional norms and values.

Like most nations, strong attachments to one's native country expand when unpleasant conditions that endanger the traditional standards arise (Hobsbawm; Ranger, 1984) and, similar to most Asian countries, the enhancement of a Korean national identity and distinct nationalistic approaches towards national identification originated from external penetration and imposition of foreign powers (Lee, 1986). While the construction of national identity under the spectrum of ethnic nationalism can be extremely troublesome due to its exclusionary practices, the Korean peninsula has suffered numerous impositions from outside forces which lead to the need to strengthen national identity as constant threats not only to internal unity but to traditional values were made throughout the years. Subsequently, to protect their cherished beliefs, a higher emphasis was placed upon the greatness of the Korean race, their history, rich traditions and unique alphabet, which has thus resulted in the strong doctrine of *danil minjok*, or homogenous ethnic group, a fundamental concept central to the understanding of the nation's self-perception as it represents the basis of the foundation for the Korean nation, evidencing the superiority of their ethnicity and single bloodline that evolved through five thousand years of history (Draudt, 2016).

This idea of national homogeneity has been constantly present in Koreans' self-perception process and, as expected, was intensified when the country faced conditions of insecurity. Respectively, in 1905, the Japanese invaded Korea and declared it would henceforth

become a Japanese protectorate and, eventually, a formal colony of the Empire (Young, 2000). Expectedly, the Empire executed policies of hybridization and, as a colony, Korea underwent several reforms aimed at exploiting the unpaid manpower of Koreans and dissolving Korean culture through the implementation of measures that strictly prohibited the use of their native language as well as demanded the adoption of Japanese names and values by constructing Shinto shrines, nonetheless, these abusive behaviors simultaneously deepened nationalist fervor within Koreans and enhanced movements of resistance (Young, 2000). The thirty-five years of colonial rule were characterized by strong anti-Japanese feelings, usually displayed through student and labor strikes and, in August of 1945, and Koreans were liberated from colonial rule.

Nevertheless, the end of annexation did not equal peace in the peninsula. As new parties and political ideologies started to bloom following the emancipation of newly independent Korea, no agreement on the political future of the country was made thus resulting in the division of the country along the 38th parallel where, up North, communist leader Kim Il-Sung lead with strong support of the USSR and, South of the border, a new government was formed under American influence by Rhee Syngman (1948-1960), creating an ideological and physical separation that persists until today. Albeit sharing the same foundations, history, customs and traditions, both states underwent a process of nation-building that was highly built upon determining which Korea was the 'righteous' one.

The First Republic of South Korea was elected in 1948 and was characterized by its profoundly deep anti-communist sentiments displayed by President Rhee Syngman who constantly advocated for independence and, despite the great emphasis placed upon ethnic nationalism, little efforts were made towards unification as the President's personal views against the communist regime were quite severe. Nevertheless, after twelve years of governance, Rhee's presidency came to an end when, on the 19th of April of 1960, a wave of large-scale protests composed of high-schoolers and college students was marked by the harsh commands of the President, which resulted in the death of more than one hundred students by the national authorities. Although democratic in practice, the following governments were characterized by this same feeling of political instability, censorship and police brutality against those who opposed the system, accordingly, similar to the April Revolution previously mentioned, every administration was challenged by popular uprisings, such as the Gwangju massacre where five hundred young people were killed and thousands more injured. These revolutionary events are crucial to mention as they reflect an important aspect of Korean national identity and, more importantly, demonstrate how those who made the nation could not perceive themselves without the North. For almost five decades, students from across the

southern part of the peninsula came together to demand an independent, democratic, socially just and developed nation by taking the role of the country's representatives (Campbell, 2011), as Dong Won-Mo writes, these students acted as "the single most persistent, cohesive and autonomous political opposition force in Korea" (Dong, 1987, p.223).

In addition to the demands of a democratic nation, these students were known for emphasizing the need for unification for a prosperous Korea. Unable to conceive an idea of national unity without their counterparts in the North, the student movements often shamed older generations for perpetuating such division and asserted that the entire Korean nation extended transversely throughout the peninsula, this meaning that the call for unification was the only direction to follow towards a socially just and democratic Korea (Campbell, 2011). As demands for unification quickly overcame the previous appeals for democratization, we begin to see how, for so many years, the younger layers of society fought for the consolidation of the peninsula forasmuch as a divided Korea was not a feasible solution. This persistence upon matters of unification illustrates the importance of North Korea to the construction of the nation, as one could not be perceived without the other, and demonstrates how South Koreans used to display evident markers of ethnic nationalism in their discourses and actions as the law of blood acted preeminently.

While the courageous acts of the South Korean youth were handed down from 1945 until the late 1990s, this idea of students as representatives of the nation's interests was eventually lost and, ultimately, younger generations have started to lose interest in the topic of unification and eventually alienated themselves from the North, hence disregarding the idea of a single national identity combining both counties.

2.3. Othering North Korea

The process of nation and identity building is a complex occurrence that is dependent upon both internal and external factors as nationalism suggests the juxtaposition of the 'us' against an 'other' that strengthens one's national identity. Ha and Jang (2016) tell us that, as a country that was divided by foreign powers, the need for national value was desperate thus, following the aftermath of the Korean War, both nations actively engaged in measures that would construct the national 'self' in opposition to the 'other'. This understanding of the 'other' is inextricably connected to the concept of national identity since belonging to a nation implies not only knowing which members represent the 'we', but also recognizing who are the contrasting 'others' that further reinforce the 'self' (Triandafyllidou, 1998). These processes of building a singular national identity function as a 'double-edged relationship' that, on the one hand, is

constructed upon various elements that bind the members of the nation together, such as common historical memories or ethnic ties while, on the other hand, the understanding of national entity is equally dependent upon the existence of other nations that do not belong to the in-group and from which the nation differentiates itself from (Triandafyllidou, 1998).

Throughout centuries, the emergence of nations has been characterized by the existence of significant ‘others’ that have marked the development of a nation’s identity by means of their threatening presence, whether in terms of territorial claims or questioning the in-group’s cultural uniqueness or authenticity (Triandafyllidou, 1998). The understanding of the ‘other’ gives contrast to the nation in question and enhances its identity within the process of building a country’s national identity. The case of South Korea, albeit portraying a relatively recent case of nation-building, has not failed to depict the typical characteristics seen in the majority of processes seen throughout the world. Nonetheless, while most nations construct themselves in contrast to a foreign ‘other’, South Korea’s government has vigorously engaged in processes of differentiation against a nation that fundamentals its national identity on similar concepts, such as history, ethnicity and culture, making the Korean case an uncommon and exceptional situation.

As previously depicted in the previous chapter, at the center of the imagined Korean national identity lies the discourse of a singular pan-Korean nation which emphasizes the importance of blood ties and positions North Korea as a brother that was corrupted by outside forces that made the country a victim of international affairs. This understanding of North Korea as ‘self’ rather than ‘other’ has been the foundation for governmental efforts towards unification as the current condition of division is seen as a temporary measure. Nevertheless, the present dissertation will further demonstrate that the people of South Korea have been enthusiastically engaging in endeavors particular to their contemporary understanding of national identity and, consequently, have inevitably developed their definition of national identity not only separate from the North, as well as it has been constructed in opposition from the North through a process of *othering* their co-nationals.

Over the last seventy years, it has become evident that both Koreas have developed diverging national discourses of Korean nationalism rooted in their own beliefs and experiences (Hart, 1999). In the North, Kim Jong Un and his antecessors have continually criticized the foreign influences within the South and their impact on the homogeneity of the nation while in the South, the declining relevance of the importance of blood and race as the central features of Korean identity have led the population to create a national unit based on its evolving relation with the world. Establishing a discourse that distances itself from North Korea, the South has

created its 'self' in two ways ' through the diffusion of distance from, and fear, of the North Korean 'other' on the one hand, and through the consolidation of a 'new self' at the same time as seeking recognition from others more important to South Korea than North Korea' (Hart, 1999). By *othering* the North, the South has conceived a great distance between the two nations and has equally created a hierarchy between the two, this meaning that, to the international community, the South presents itself as the superior and developed part of the overall self (Son, 2015), thus resulting in a complex and contradictory position towards the North. While the South Korean government still appeals to the need to overcome obstacles to unification by emphasizing the need to unite under shared 'Koreanness', it has contradictorily undergone various efforts to demonstrate how South Korea represents an independent state in all economic, political and social aspects.

According to Bleiker (2004), both ROK and DPRK have built their individual national identity on 'negative terms', this meaning that both regimes have developed political systems that confer each country the entitlement of representing the entire Korean peninsula, nonetheless, these claims remain flawed as these identities have equally become mutually-exclusive in the sense that a South Korean citizen is not a citizen of North Korea and vice-versa (Grzelczyk, 2014). Throughout the decades, South Korea has exposed its people to an international environment that challenges the outdated parameters of national identity and has, as we will see ahead, acquired new features that come in conflict with the traditional national discourses of unification. The evident distinction between the positive association of 'Us', the advanced South Koreans, against the negative 'Them', the under-developed North Korea, remains an obstacle to a coherent and effective stance on unification as the incentives for such revolve around the plea of ethnic ties. However, the reality is that South Korea has been actively developing an exclusive form of national identity that no longer includes the North and, in fact, one of the key features of this renewed identity is how defines its understanding of 'self' in contrast to its northern neighbor.

2.4. Globalization Movements

Currently, various works provide us with a rich and complex understanding of what is meant by Korean identity. Nonetheless, the present dissertation argues that, over the years the need for unification has been drastically decreasing and, while no single factor is responsible for the weakening of collective identity, the present chapter aims to demonstrate that the driving force behind this decline is the development of a separate, and exclusive, South Korean national identity as a result of the globalization processes that the country has been exposed to since the armistice agreement signed in 1953.

In order to analyze the transformations that have led to the creation of a separate identity, it is important to clearly define globalization as, just like national identity, globalization is a complex concept to define due to the lack of consensus among scholars on several important aspects, such as its impacts on national unity. For this research, globalization will be defined as ‘a compression of the world due to increased global interdependence’ (Robertson, 1992), it is a multifaceted process where connections between people are becoming faster and more closely linked as a result of the increased movement of people, goods, services and information worldwide (Sasaki, 2004). The academia mostly conceives globalization as an era of establishing and cementing relations where, as Samuel Kim (2000) explains, various complex, interdependent, yet interrelated, processes that stretch, intensify and accelerate worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of human relations as well as transactions to the point where decisions and activities in one part of the world have an immediate impact on individuals or states in other parts of the world.

As aforementioned, there is an open debate on whether globalization has had a positive or negative impact on national identity, and, while there is no clear consensus among the academia, it remains important to go over the different perspectives provided by academics. Scholars such as Gellner (1983) or Hobsbawm (1992) predict the decline of nationalism as a consequence of enhanced interconnectedness between countries where,

as people become global consumers of goods and information, the production and maintenance of a homogeneous national identity within the global village becomes increasingly difficult, the cross-border flow of information making it difficult for national identities to retain their unique significance and distinguish themselves from other, similar entities. (Ariely, 2019, p.765).

These scholars consider the free flow of information and national goods among nations a threat to national identity as they predict that, in time, nationalism will become less important

under the waves of globalization processes that promote cosmopolitanism rather than strengthening identification with local/national communities (Beck, 2006).

Nonetheless, it is important to understand that globalization does not influence all members of society in the same way (Ariely, 2012) and, contrary to this understanding of globalization as a homogenizing tool where countries adopt the dominant culture which, in this case, corresponds to the embracement of Western culture and values at the expense of their own, emerges a group of scholars who anticipate the rise of nationalism and reinforcement of national individuality amidst the processes of globalization. Academics as Anthony Smith (2008) and Mary Kaldor (2004) argue that, contrary to the previous understandings, globalization has had a 'backlash' effect where the cultural diversity that rose from globalization has consequently reinforced nationalistic feelings, creating contemporary forms of nationalism constructed as a direct response to globalization as "globalization processes do not only favor cultural interconnectedness, they favor cultural disconnectedness as well" (Kaldor, 2004, p.166).

The array of theoretical perspectives demonstrates that, although there is a clear relation between globalization and national identity, the impact of multiculturalism on national identification is understood in various distinctive ways. In the specific context of South Korea, Shin (2006) argues that, as the latter school of thought, the intensification of globalization as well as the economic and social uncertainties that originate from such, have consequently resulted in the intensification and reinforcement of the country's national identity in the form of ethnic nationalism. As South Korea has had an intense extended relationship with ethnic nationalism, Gi-Wook Shin (2006), one of the most influential scholars focused on Korea's nationalism, claims that ethnic-nationalistic feelings have emerged within South Korea as a defense mechanism against globalization forces. Accordingly, in order to protect the nation's interests and values, which are perceived to be in danger by the economic and social instabilities brought by globalization, South Koreans resort to the homogeneity of the Korean race and its superiority when compared to other countries. Consequently, this behavior leads South Koreans to consider the North as equal, hence supporting unification based on the understanding that both North and South Koreans represent one singular 'race' united by blood that must unify in order to re-establish the dignity of the Korean race. Scholars like Shin (2006) and Lee (2006) also believe that the penetration of transnational forces heightens inter-Korean nationalism as South Korean society tends to grow more suspicious of the foreign interventions that continuously intercede within the security affairs in the Korean Peninsula.

In contrast, a more recent and comprehensive study by Campbell (2016), involving a sample of interviews with South Korean university students, found that globalization has in fact led to the intensification of nationalism however, contrary to what was developed by other scholars, no connection was found with Korean nationalism. Instead, as the central premises of this dissertation argue, younger layers of society have seemed to develop an exclusive form of South Korean national identity as an outcome of globalization.

Before disclosing the ways in which globalization has had an impactful force on South Korean national identity, it is important to reiterate that this process by which people, ideas, goods, knowledge and information spread around the world remains a complex and multifaceted one that cannot be ascribed to a singular cause. Therefore, the overall process of globalization is built upon the interdependence and overlap of different types of globalization that, when in touch with one another, impact greatly upon nations and their society. This process can be divided into economic, political and cultural globalization.

Economic globalization refers to the overall integration of national economies in the global market, this includes free trade agreements that countries establish with one another to expand their market opportunities beyond national borders and ultimately grow the country's economy. Political globalization covers the efforts that a country forms in attempt to politically align itself with other nations or international organizations, especially to tackle global issues like environmental change or famine. As these problems are frequently intertwined, international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) cooperate with governments to tackle these global problems and come together, both politically and economically, to achieve global solutions. Lastly, comes cultural globalization, this process involves the exchange and diffusion of ideas, values and products across borders. This form of globalization is possible predominantly due to the evolution of technologies that allowed for the dissemination of such practices through social media and digital platforms, thus promoting engagement and interconnection between millions of people across the world.

As mentioned, these processes are interdependent and often reinforce each other hence resulting in a dynamic that impacts societies worldwide, as to which South Korea is no exception. Respectively, the following chapters will expose South Korea's globalization processes over the years in order to demonstrate how these events have led to the creation of a separate 'globalized' national identity that does not include the North. Moreover, it will also demonstrate the ways in which this reinvented national identity is solidifying itself not only across the country as well as across the international sphere.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Based on the character of the research, the present dissertation has been developed through the elaboration of a qualitative literature review, which focuses on building empirical research through a rigorous method of collecting, assessing and synthesizing relevant literature. In addition to the collection of secondary peer-reviewed academic literature and official documents, this dissertation also benefited from the analysis of pre-existing data from The Seoul National University Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS), a national institution that aims to ‘contribute to society through academic research on the various issues that will need to be solved in the process of realizing unification and peace’ (IPUS, 2020) to supplement its main argumentation.

The IPUS research center conducts annual national surveys on the perception of unification, inter-Korean integration and perceptions on North Korean defectors aiming to provide an authentic and legitimate representation of South Koreans' attitudes regarding an eventual unification with the North. The annual report consists of a cross-analysis survey among 1,200 respondents, between the ages of 19 and 74, living in the 16 municipalities and provinces of South Korea (IPUS, 2016). For more than ten years, Seoul National University has made remarkable efforts in collecting the trends and patterns of attitudes towards North Korea and matters of unification which, due to the scope and richness of the report, allows for a distinct and clear understanding of the patterns of perception on unification throughout the years.

To interpret the dynamics of nationalism within South Korea, data from two annual surveys will be used to emphasize the central claims of this study, namely, the *2016 Unification Perception Survey* will be analyzed and compared to the edition of the *2022 Unification Perception Survey* to provide an enhanced insight into the proposed research questions. It is important to note that, while all of the data was retrieved from these national reports, the collected data is not represented in its original form as the tables presented in this dissertation were rearranged with the use of Excel to display only the information relevant to the research.

Considering the adopted research design, the present work aims to situate its conclusions in an already existing frame of literature and question the trends of nationalism within South Korea. Accordingly, as evidenced at the beginning of the research, it is once again presented the research questions:

Is the World witnessing the emergence of a new South Korean identity?

What are the elements that compose this new South Korean identity?

Does this new identity have any impact on the willingness to unify?

Considering the goal of this dissertation, the main objectives of this research are: (1) to evaluate if the understanding of a common Korean identity is still present within South Koreans' perception of self and, if the case proves not to be true, as the main argument of this dissertation argues, then (2) what are the elements that influence and contribute to the formation of an independent South Korean national identity. In addition, it will also (3) analyze how this exclusive perception of national identity influences the possibility of unification with the North. Lastly, this study ambitions to assess matters of nationalism in our contemporary world and (4) explore if the rapid processes of globalization can in fact intercede with the formation of national identity.

Chapter 4 - The Emergence of a South Korean Identity

4.1 Globalized South Korea

As briefly introduced, the expanding interconnection shared among nations can be determined as the paramount factor in the establishment of an exclusive South Korean nationalism that is removed from the traditional discourses of ethnic nationalism. Respectively, the first and most crucial instance that has led to the development of a globalized South Korea can be traced back to 1997 with the intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the country's national economy.

With the signed armistice that resulted in the cessation of the Korean War in 1953, South Korea endeavored to foster economic growth and, up until the mid-1990s, the country enjoyed rapid growth and accomplished unforeseen rates of economic development when compared to its neighboring countries. Nonetheless, the four decades of financial prosperity were soon to abruptly erupt when the country's economy crashed in 1997 and resulted in the most demanding national crisis since the civil war (Coe & Kim, 2002). Similar to numerous vulnerable nations, South Korea had no other choice but to request financial assistance from the IMF and, from November of 1997 until August of 2000, the IMF intervention not only resulted in economic and political challenges to Korean society, as well as it brought ideological transformations that forever altered the dynamics of nationalism within the region (Cho, 2008). As Koreans witnessed the consecutive *en masse* layoffs, the collapse of several *chaebols* (major industrial conglomerates) and found themselves in critical conditions of financial instability, the ineffective acts of the ROK's government and the need to request foreign aid were translated into frustration and a sense of failure was spread nation-wide. As Ha and Jang (2016) explain, as a country that was divided by foreign powers, national value was highly needed. Hence, this urgency for national value was severely disturbed by the economic crisis of 1997 as it created stressful financial situations and, more importantly, produced an intense sense of depression and frustration that substantially damaged Korean nationalism as it challenged the country's reputation of national development (Lee & Cho, 2009). Despite the unfavorable situation that the country was in, the intervention also provided society a chance to, once again, rethink the notions of Korean nationalism and, returning to its' Confucian values, South Koreans understood the assignment of letting go and focusing on the reconstruction of their nation (Lee & Cho, 2009).

In light of this crisis, nationalism served as a stimulus for economic development as patriotic reactions to the national crisis would quickly emerge as a way to restore the damaged national pride. As such, one great example of this was the Gold-Collecting campaign in early 1998 where almost four million ordinary citizens voluntarily donated their personal belongings containing gold, such as wedding bands and necklaces, to national banks to help the country overcome and repay the national debt to the IMF, which was possible to do so ahead of schedule and resulted in the end of the crisis in just three years.

Despite the several negative impacts of the crisis on the history of South Korea, one condition implemented by the IMF to achieve financial recovery proved to be crucial not only to the economic development of the country, but to the establishment of a renewed national identity that would soon not include North Korea. The IMF bailout to the South Korean government included a rescue package of a total of 58 billion USD, one of the biggest loans provided in IMF history, which, due to the circumstances of the crisis, came with strict impositions and conditions such as monetary transparency or, the most relevant to the development of the country, the demand to open Korean financial markets to foreign investments. As it was previously disclosed, up until very late, the Korean Peninsula was referred to as a 'hermit kingdom' due to its isolationist geography and limited contact with foreign countries throughout its existence as a nation. This practice of discerning outside influence as a threat to internal values and stability was a common procedure among Asian countries and, consequently, with the Japanese occupation of three and half decades, Korea maintained this suspicion of the foreign by limiting and restricting its access to overseas nations. Nonetheless, the IMF would soon suspend these protectionist practices in order to bring South Korea to the international sphere and embed the country in economic globalization.

As the crisis unfolded, the intervention demanded that the South Korean government would participate more actively in international trade and imposed structural reforms to overcome the financial crisis. Despite the harsh living conditions that resulted from the dramatic reform that the country was subject to, it is important to note that, ultimately, the outcomes of the national crisis proved to be very impactful in the future as they forcefully made South Korea enter a new phase of globalization where profound changes in the economic institutions and renewed financial practices led to intense transformations in South Korean's social organization and cultural values (Jonghoe, 2007). As it will now be elaborated, these societal transformations have unavoidably reshaped the country's understanding of 'self' and have ultimately contributed to further the distance felt between North and South.

The economic globalization of South Korea is one of the world’s most successful stories as, being a country that was once dependent on foreign aid to survive due to the destruction of the Korean War, South Korea promptly transformed the country’s national strategy from a protectionist one to an export-oriented approach, thus becoming the seventh largest exporter of goods and the tenth largest importer in the world¹. This transformation from a war-torn country into one of the world’s most industrialized nations is driven by the worldwide high demand for Korean supplies such as automobiles or electronics, which ultimately transformed the country into a notable exporter with a healthy economy, as the progressive growth of the trade surplus of the country indicates (Table 4.1.1).

Moreover, trade represents almost 80% of South Korea’s GDP which, once again, demonstrates that the country has an exceptionally profitable, vigorous and diverse economy that responds to international needs, thus following the pattern of powerful economies, such as the USA, which is indicative of the country’s successful integration into the international market, as one can see in Table 4.1.2. Nonetheless, this insertion into the global economy can also have negative repercussions for the country. During times of crisis, the reliance on international demands can leave nations vulnerable to market fluctuations that severely impact their economies, which is evident for South Korea during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, and again in 2020 with the aftermath of COVID-19 (Table 4.1.2).

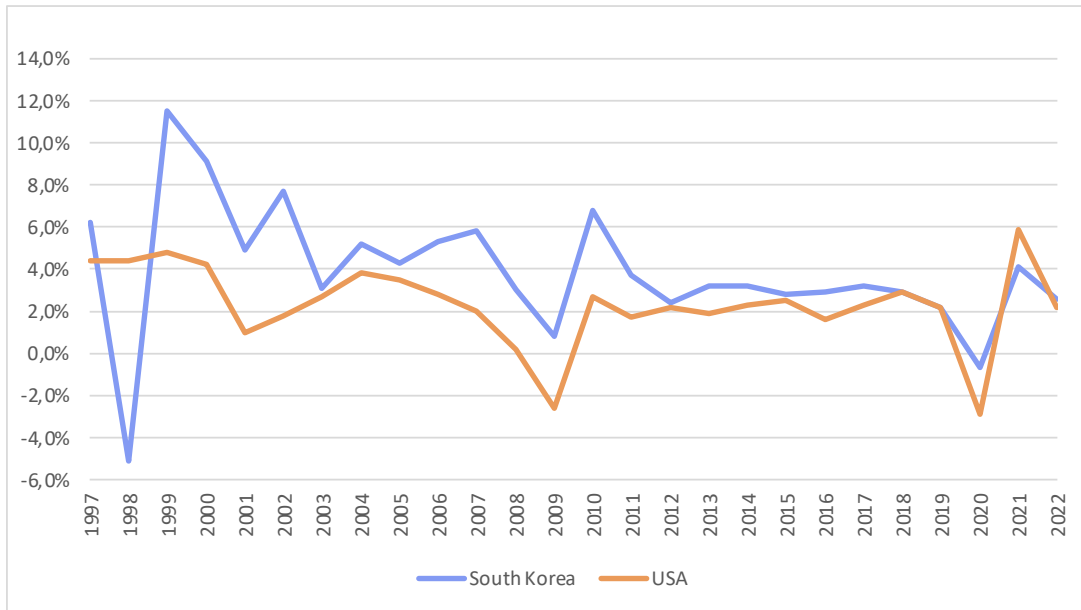
Table 4.1.1. Foreign Trade in South Korea. (USD), 2017-2021. Source: Santander Trade (2023)

Foreign Trade		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Values						
Imports	of	478,478	535,202	503,343	467,633	615,093
Goods	<i>(million USD)</i>					
Exports	of	573,694	604,860	543,233	512,498	644,400
Goods	<i>(million USD)</i>					

¹ World Trade Organization (n.d) *Republic of Korea and the WTO – Member Information*. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/korea_republic_e.htm

Table 4.1.2. GDP Annual Growth (%). 1997-2022.

Source: The World Bank (2022)



While the economic globalization of a country requires a balanced management in order to prevent overreliance, South Korea remains an outstanding case of global integration that has brought prestige and prosperity to the nation.

As we have seen, South Korea has made remarkable efforts to transform its drastic numbers of national poverty into becoming one of the most advanced economies in the world, however, while both the government and the hard-working people of the South were certainly successful in expanding their nation’s global position, its role in the international sphere remained limited as its status as an ‘emerging middle-power’ did not generate much influence worldwide. Before addressing South Korea’s global role, it remains essential to understand that a country’s position in the international sphere relates to its acceptance of the international norms and standards which are “heavily shaped by Western experiences and expertise, with minimal input from the rest of the World” (Kim, 2015, p.741). Over the last centuries, the West undertook the Euro-American missionary task of ‘developing’ nations in the Global South (Kim, 2015), thus predetermining that the economic development of a nation was not sufficient to become a truly developed country. Therefore, these nations would need to actively pursue development strategies set under Westernized values that would equate with their economic achievements as “the adoption of international norms was a means to improve international standing” (Kim, 2015, p.733). The international society follows a strict vertical order which benefits the interests of the West in a process where nations

Have projected their positive developmental values into their own term of the ‘developed’ and negative values into the concept of the ‘underdeveloped’, creating a hierarchy between the two. Under the slogan of the ‘modernization of the fatherland’, the most urgent national goal was set the escape from the status of underdeveloped, which became an important discursive basis for Korea’s aggressive national modernization project. (Kim, 2014, p.401)

As Kim (2014) tells us, as these recently-formed nations began to emancipate in a globalized world, the quick realization of their ‘underdevelopment’ led governments to engage in ‘un-underdeveloping’ tasks, which essentially constituted various globalization-engaging initiatives or, as we have previously disclosed, aimed to engage in political globalization in order align themselves with the ‘developed nations’.

In the case of South Korea, these measures were implemented under the brand *Global Korea* which represented the government’s economic, political, ideological and cultural initiatives to reconstruct the country’s national identity as a future-orientated, multicultural and visionary nation (Watson, 2012). As previously mentioned, a country’s position in the global hierarchy correlates to its development or commitment to the international norms and, unsurprisingly, South Korea has endeavored in soft-power performances to rebrand its identity as modern and developed. Due to the country’s absence of influence in the international sphere, South Korea has thus engaged in this ‘Global’ initiative in order to expand its role worldwide and has managed to do so by emphasizing its ability to use global forums, playing a more active role in the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), thus becoming more invested as well as present in compelling global issues such as climate change or peacekeeping operations (Kim, 2015). Respectively, since then, ROK’s government has actively taken a more proactive role in maintaining international peace and, as of 2022, the country has displaced 545 military personnel and experts to different United Nations’ Peacekeeping Operations² and has equally reshaped and formulated a variety of national policies in order to cement the country’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda and UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

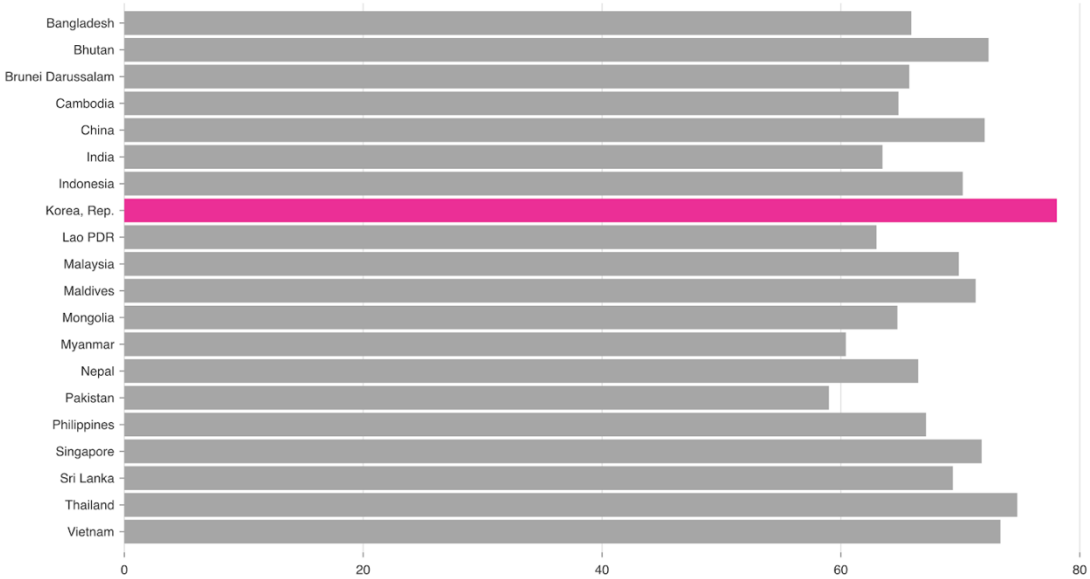
The SDGs represent a global initiative where nations throughout the world commit themselves to obey by the 128 targets that seek to accomplish all human rights and protect the planet from degrading through collective action³. While these goals are highly ambitious, Table 4.1.3, demonstrates that South Korea has responded positively and, when compared to its

² United Nations Peacekeeping (n.d.) *Troop and Police contributions*. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

³ United Nations (n.d) *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

neighboring countries in East and South Asia, South Korea stands out and becomes the country that has composed more efforts to coordinate and implement the SDGs not as goals, but rather as successful developments, accordingly, in the SDGs Index Rank, South Korea is placed at 31st of 166 countries and displays a total score of 78%⁴

Table 4.1.3. Overall score of performances of the SDG in East and South Asia (%). 2022. Source: Sustainable Development Report (2022)



Even though these numbers are not indicative of the country’s success in implementing measures that result in an equal and sustainable nation, as there are still enormous gaps to fill in terms of promoting gender equality or limiting greenhouse gas emissions, it is indicative of the country’s willingness to launch campaigns that address these issues and improve South Korea’s development in the international sphere.

Additionally, to the same extent that the South Korean government was actively engaging in international initiatives that would translate into a more ‘developed’ Korea, it was also recognized that it was equally urgent to implement the adoption of international standards within the borders of South Korea, this meaning that the values that were preached outside would need to be embraced by society in order to become a truly advanced nation. Due to its isolationist practices of the past, South Korea remained closed to foreign transactions while other nations would actively engage in inter-cultural exchanges, which inevitably led the country to maintain its narrow approach to other cultures for longer. Nonetheless, as

⁴ Sustainable Development Report (n.d) *Country Profiles – South Korea.* <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/profiles/korea-rep>

aforementioned, the insertion in a globalized world did not rely solely on economic development and the government understood that, amongst other topics, “Ethnocentricity and an obsession with purity of blood are rejected on the ground that these outlooks are characteristics of underdeveloped societies. They are disparaged as pre-modern perspectives that Koreans should discard.” (Kim, 2015, p.736).

Respectively, another facet of the ‘Global Korea’ initiative was the rebranding of South Korea as a multicultural nation that is open to diversity. This embracement of ethnic diversity directly challenges the country’s history of racial homogeneity, which remains an arduous goal to achieve, nonetheless, the globalization flows have allowed for a more constant circulation of immigrants and travelers, both *to* and *from* South Korea, which inevitably results in the normalization of cultural exchange. These processes are understood as interlocked practices, as Kim (2015) explains “Accepting immigrants is an inevitable consequence of South Korea’s economic development. Koreans becoming more culturally tolerant would signal improvement in Korean’s civic attitudes and would illustrate that the country’s cultural development finally matched its economic one” (Kim, 2015, p.739).

For a country that retained the rhetorics of ethnic nationalism for so long, it is evident that the state-led re-branding policies that took place were looked at with suspicion at first as the government tried to transform a country that was once obsessed with blood purity into a nation that welcomes, and encourages, multiculturalism. Nonetheless, as South Korea invests in its outside image as an advanced country, multiculturalism becomes more naturalized and currently, 3% of the population of the South is composed of foreigners and almost 400 thousand families are multicultural households⁵. While this number is significantly inferior to most nations, it represents an unforeseen circumstance when one considers the country’s past prominence of *danil minjok* and importance of ethnic ties. However, as it has been shown, amidst the course of the structural reform imposed by the IMF, the country was introduced to a vast globalized network characterized by the improvement, as well as expansion, of technology and communication industries where people were, and still are, encouraged to engage in unlimited inter-cultural exchanges and access to overseas experiences and cultures. Like the majority of nations, with the revolution of technology, the South Korean society was “greatly swayed by the liberal economic logic, represented by such values as efficiency, free competition, material wealth, globalization and survival of the fittest” (Jonghie, 2007, p.184).

⁵ Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS). (n.d.). *Transition to a Multicultural Society: Korea.net*. <https://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/Society/Transformation-Multicultural-Society>

This chapter has shown that, although the initiatives to turn South Korea ‘Global’ began as an attempt to harmonize with the international standards and consequently improve the nation’s soft power capabilities within the global hierarchy, the globalization processes in South Korea have completely revolutionized the ways in which South Korea views and defines itself to the exterior. While the relationship shared between nationalism and globalization remains a complex and not linear process, it is certain that the contact the country had with other nations previous to its insertion into the international sphere had some degree of influence, although limited, on South Korea. However, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the combination of economic, political and cultural globalization have conceived new parameters for the construction of ‘self’ within the South, which now defines itself as a modern, cross-cultural and developed middle-power, which largely opposes the realities Korean nationalism.

As the current chapter has laid the foundations to understand what has led to the development of a South Korean identity, the following chapters will exhibit the ways in which this new national identity is formed, especially among younger generations, and question its future implications.

4.2 The South Korean Youth

While national identity-related questions remain open to debate and the case of Korea represents an extremely complex instance that cannot be attributed to a single cause, it is here argued that the introduction of the country to the previously mentioned movements of globalization facilitated and amplified the distance felt between the two nations and, ultimately, resulted on the creation of a separate identity within the South. As one might assume, the manifestation of this South Korean national identity must be evidently more present amongst the younger layers of society and, as these young people represent not only the current inhabitants of the Korean Peninsula, as well as the future civil society and leaders of the South, it remains crucial to grasp the extent of the felt discrepancies between the two countries in order to acquire a more detailed understanding of its impacts on future unification prospects.

As the South Korean government implemented numerous initiatives to guarantee the prosperity of the nation, the opening of the markets and dialogues with international entities allowed for a constant flow of goods as well as values that would forever alter the dynamics of national identity. Respectively, one of the most impacted areas by globalization was South Koreans’ purchasing power as the rapid-paced economic recovery that came with the period of post-IMF crisis “saw a dramatic increase in foreign imports and loosening of social sanctions

toward consuming luxury products” (Koo, 2007, p.8). The financial prosperity felt during the early-2000s was characterized by the revival of the middle-class, which essentially disappeared during the economic crisis, and the reinvention of class identity as the consumption of luxury (imported) goods now played an important role in class differentiation (Koo, 2007).

While the first generation of Koreans who grew up in the aftermath of the Korean War might consider ideology as the main distinction from those in the North, the younger generations that grew up under these years of growing prosperity and constant interaction with other cultures began to develop a new set of values that align with this contemporary lifestyle, including consumerism and modernity, which have now become intrinsic to South Korean identity. Accordingly, the rapid economic development experienced with the introduction to the globalized world has led to the widespread adoption of trends that are shared throughout varied, easily accessed, social media platforms. These platforms often promote the consumption of material high-end products as an equation of success in life and, consequently, the younger generations of those in their 20s or 30s now aspire to achieve this modern, capitalistic lifestyle. Respectively, South Korea was ranked as the world’s largest luxury goods consumer⁶, which is surprising considering that the consumption of these products in South Korea surpass those of countries like the USA or China, which have significantly larger populations, but ultimately confirms that the country has fervently succumbed to trends that are shared across borders, which may be due to the widespread access to the internet, with 98% of the country’s populace enjoying free access to it and nearly 48 million out of the 51 million South Koreans being active social media users⁷. In addition to the augmented purchasing power, and in correlation to such, another component that contributes to the redefinition of South Korean national identity is the degree of education as it is something that will, most likely, result in an improved socioeconomic position.

The aforementioned globalization processes have inevitably led to educational inequalities that ultimately translate into societal discrimination as access to employment becomes more severely restricted (Koo, 2007). This ‘educational struggle’ functions as a snowball effect where middle-class families spend great amounts of money to improve their children’s outcomes in school in order to assure them a place in prestige universities which, ultimately, will provide these children with more opportunities to achieve a high-paying tertiary

⁶ Choi, J. (2023, July 18). *What’s Korea’s trends as world’s largest luxury consumer market of last year?* Businesskorea. <https://www.businesskorea.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=118590>

⁷ Cervi, M. (2023, July 8). *Social media in South Korea in 2023*. InterAd. <https://www.interad.com/en/insights/social-media-korea>

job that will provide them with the financial security needed to perpetuate this consumerist and modern lifestyle (Park, 2010). While the foundation of these societal problems is sustained through a variety of interconnected issues, one of its perpetrators is globalization. Accordingly, one of the many ways in which globalization has affected educational equality has been through the emphasis placed upon learning the English language as “South Korea becomes more closely integrated into the global economy, individual competence in English is closely linked to occupational success and social mobility” (Koo, 2007, p.13). In this context, one can thus say that globalization and the consequent adoption of neo-liberal values have penetrated within the South Korean youth as there is a constant pursuit for status, which is measured through the consumption of valuable goods that can only be acquired through the achievement of an exceptional school curriculum. This ultimately creates a loop of societal inequalities that is beneficial to families capable of providing their children with the necessary tools to thrive, especially as proficiency in English becomes a requirement.

Following this narrative, another manifestation of globalization in Korean society, more evidently on the youth, is their ‘cosmopolitan-enlightenment’ and the relevance that is placed upon one’s *worldliness* or *savoir faire*, as Campbell (2011) emphasizes. This meaning that “experiences of travel, being aware and adept culturally, fluency or ability in a foreign language are the markers of cosmopolitan-enlightenment (...) a lack of worldliness creates embarrassment and distance from young people, whilst those who hold these characteristics inspire admiration and pride” (Campbell, 2011, p.102). In addition to the growing encouragement to learn English as, to succeed in the international arena, the country needs its future citizens to be equipped with the ability to thrive in various international situations, there has also been a conferred growing status to those who study abroad. Essentially, there is a growing insistence on the value of studying abroad not only because it demonstrates that one has the economic possibility to do their studies in another country, which confers financial status and prestige, but also because as a member of this global community, the South Korean youth must be culturally skilled for future achievements. Respectively, since 2016, more than one million South Korean students have benefited from the experience of furthering their studies abroad⁸.

This growing presence of South Korean students in the world is equally illustrative of the government’s will to expose its students to inter-cultural exchanges as the expanding number of South Koreans who study abroad is, in part, only possible due to government

⁸ International Trade Administration (2022). *South Korea – Education Services*. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/south-korea-education-services>

initiatives that make studying abroad more accessible to its population. Against this background, as younger generations become more in contact with other cultures, they develop the ambition to expand the nation's reputation overseas as a modern and developed South Korea that is up-to-date with the contemporary issues of the 21st century. Due to the experiences that they share abroad or through the constant use of social media platforms, these young adults are becoming more exposed to matters of ethnicity, minority rights as well as environmental questions and, as a result of such, are equally becoming more politically aware and involved in these issues, often demanding the South Korean government to act in accordance with the remaining 'developed' nations.

These behavioral patterns of pursuing social status through the consumption of luxury brands, the adoption of the so-called global values and the decision to participate in movements that simultaneously raise national awareness and equally improve the country's position in the global hierarchy, demonstrate that globalization has had a decisive impact on developing a South Korean national identity centered around the concepts of a globalized community where consumerism and status create a fast-paced and competitive background that highly influences younger generations.

As the younger members of society grow up in this 'developed' contemporary society, where interest in issues regarding the North are rapidly declining due to the weariness of the topic over the years, the focus of the youth seems to concentrate around topics that bring prosperity to their country. Unlike their ancestors who demanded the Government for improved unification measures, the contemporary South Korean youth has shifted their attention to matters of economic and social justice that resonate with their renewed definition of 'self' rather than turning their attention to a seventy-year-old issue that has not directly affected them. The headline of a newspaper article⁹ below (Figure 4.2.1) is just an example of the various protests

⁹ Koreatimes (2019) *Korean Students Take Part in Global Climate Strike*. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/10/113_276265.html

Korean students take part in global climate strike



Korean students and environmental activists call on the government to take stronger measures to fight climate change at Gwanghwamun Square in central Seoul, Friday. Yonhap

Figure 4.2.1 - Headline of *Koreatimes* Newspaper Article.

that have occurred in recent times which demonstrate the alignment with the new values of South Korean society, whereas no protests in favor of unification or regarding the North were registered in the last years.

Upon a more profound analysis of the various impacts that globalization has had on the lifestyle of South Koreans since the Korean War in the 1950s, it is certain that these younger members of society have been deeply influenced by the ‘development’ of their nation as they grew up in years of prosperity and abundance where the Western culture and the adoption of ‘universal’ values that pre-determine a nation’s place in the global hierarchy, resulted generational differences where young adults are more focused in issues exclusive to the South. Notwithstanding the forced nature of the IMF intervention and the demands that were stipulated, it is notable that the benefits that came with the economic development of the country were certainly happily received by the population, which quickly embraced the fast-paced lifestyle that is characteristic of global capitals such as New York or London.

This constant engagement with other cultures partly reveals why these young adults are more focused on demanding accountability from their government towards matters of inequality or climate action, that maintain their economic and social position, rather than shifting their attention towards vain attempts of unification that would inevitably disturb the country’s prosperity, as this generation would be the one most likely bear the majority of the financial burden that would derive from establishing a unified Korea.

4.3 Banal South Korean Nationalism.

The study of nationhood was revolutionized by Michael Billig's argument of banal national as a 'national flag hanging unnoticed on a public building' (Billig, 1995). The focus of this perspective is that national identity is constantly reproduced unconsciously through tangible everyday practices and symbols such as the use of national hymns, banknotes, post office stamps, discourses and, evidently, the use of flags, as 'Billig argues that national identity is remembered because it is embedded in routines of life, such as national flags, which serve to mindlessly remind us of nationhood, even when they hang 'limply' and 'unnoticed' (Istad et. al, 2022). Banal nationalism demonstrates how, through the adoption of everyday unconscious and banal actions that are usually overlooked, nationalist sentiments are constructed, perpetuated, reproduced and reinforced on a daily basis.

Established nations frequently express nationhood through everyday practices and, while these actions may seem rather obvious, these behaviors are heavily carried with nationalist undertones that contribute to the creation of the 'self'. According to Billig (1995), and in addition to the above mentioned symbols, the people of South Korea are equally exposed to nationalist rhetoric when they do something as trivial as turn on the television, which frequently publicizes national events, showcases documentaries on past events and advertises national cuisine, or search for the weather forecast for the following week, which is limited to display the forecast within the borders of South Korea¹⁰ (Figure 4.3.1) .

Furthermore, politicians have an equally influential role in constructing the national 'self' as, through the use of vocabulary such as 'we' or 'our country' or 'our people' when strictly referring to South Korea, in both national and international settings, they are actively reinforcing the position of South Korea as a separate nation within the people of the South and simultaneously reminding the world of its distance from the North (Campbell, 2016). These everyday actions may come as mundane and often go unnoticed by societies, nonetheless, as these symbols are displayed and reinforced, the people of South Korea develop a particular understanding of the nation characterized by the most recent historic developments of the South under the ROK flag. Eventually, 'just as many South Koreans fail to realize that they are unconsciously imagining or remembering South Korea, they also fail to realize that they are forgetting the North and the unified nation' (Campbell, 2011 p.184).

¹⁰ Naver (n.d.). *Naver Weather – Provided by the Korea Meteorological Administration.* <https://weather.naver.com/>

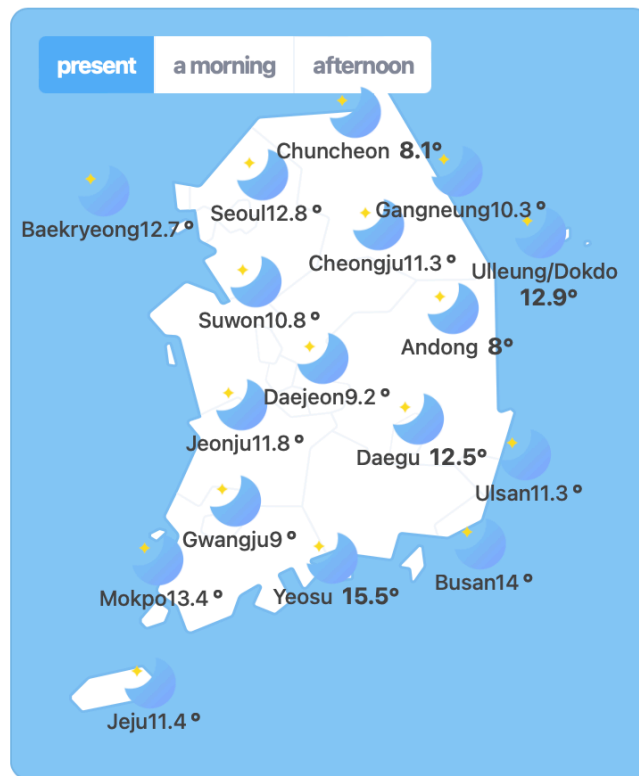


Figure 4.3.1 Weather Forecast on South Korea's main platform, Naver.

4.4) The Creation of North Korea as the 'Other' in National Textbooks

The consolidation of a national identity embraced by the majority of the population is a complex process resultant of these ordinary practices that subliminally inspire nationalist sentiment and, on a more 'regulated' or intended practice, the diffusion of national identities is produced through calculated knowledge transmission, which usually takes place at very young ages. Considering that most children spend the majority of their days in school, it is not surprising that the educational system provides a fruitful environment for national identity to develop as the focus of historical events functions as an important cataclysm on one's conscious, as well as unconscious, process of beliefs and identity formation (Hart, 1999).

Acknowledging the influence that education has as a powerful tool through which children acquire the values, beliefs and norms that are reiterated by the national community, governments throughout the world have benefited from their respective national education systems in order to transmit a particular definition of nation and 'self' to their citizens (Hart, 1999), thus constructing and reinforcing national identity by teaching the future generations how and when to proclaim such. Learning about the past of a specific nation goes beyond the retelling of national history, the textbooks used in schools are a product that reflects the state

and its interests where, through the display of chosen narratives, the nation's collective memory is perpetuated which, in turn, 'prompts future citizens to remember who their ancestors were, realize who they themselves are, and move and work toward being whom they are meant to be' (Hart, 2000). Worldwide, there is a general agreement that education emerges as a powerful mechanism that opens the door for debates and allows students to engage in discussions that provide varying perspectives, nonetheless, considering the biases existent in national textbooks, each country creates a national 'self' portrayed in terms of 'heroic' or 'entitled to territory', fundamentally a superior country against the 'other' (Kim, 2020). This emphasis on the superiority of a specific nation within the national curriculum is more evident in post-conflict societies where national value is highly needed and, as the Korean Peninsula struggled with the aftermath of the war, each Korea has evidently engaged in multiple attempts to legitimize its actions at the expense of the other (Hart, 1999).

Using the name 'Unification Education' ROK's government has aimed at teaching young South Koreans about their understanding of the dreadful events of the Korean War and defining Korean nationalism according to the national events followed by 1953. In consonance with what was mentioned above, national textbooks portray the actions experienced in certain periods according to the regime's ideology. This being said, the post-War period was still characterized by the dynamics of the Cold War where the atmosphere felt within South Korea was one of anti-communism and suspicion towards the North, which inevitably resulted in creating an image of the North as evil, deceitful as well as a threat to children's well-being (Hart, 1999). This negative representation of North Korea aimed at simultaneously creating a heroic image of the South, a trustworthy and savior nation that does not tolerate violence and deceit in the same way that the communists do. According to Hart (2000), by implementing this ideology in children through the use of textbooks in school, the government created its national 'self' over binary narratives that stigmatized the North. Hence, children were enticed to describe their country in opposition to the North, namely through the understanding that it existed the economically developed nation vs. the poor, the free vs. the oppressed, the democratic vs. the tyrannical, amongst many other harmful stereotypes (Hart, 2000).

The construction of a South Korean national identity based on positive connotations of free, liberal and advanced contributed tremendously to exacerbate the distance felt between the two countries as South Korea placed itself on top of the imagined hierarchy of Korean identity. While it is clear that this embodiment of North Korea as a violent and aggressive state certainly had negative repercussions on the people's view of those above the 38th parallel, the South's government paradoxically used its superiority to equally treat the North as its 'brother in need',

a poor and oppressed state that requires the South's help to overcome its unfortunate life under the Communist dictatorship. Inasmuch as these definitions may represent an authentic representation, it is certain that ROK's government had, once again, administered ambiguous politics that simultaneously labeled North Korea as a fearful and destructive nation from which the people of the South must be aware and not believe its lies while, at the same time, called upon national unity and belief on *danil minjok* in order to free North Koreans from the exploitation of Kim Il Sung. This dualistic approach has certainly affected the way in which not only people of the South view North Korea, but has equally impacted the way in which the world conceives both Koreas, thus establishing a hierarchy of nations within the Peninsula where South Korea is represented as the righteous and superior Korea.

Nonetheless, as the country started to engage in the international affairs that were previously mentioned and acquired new aspects to its notion of 'self', the relevance placed on unification education was vastly reduced while other national interests were given more importance (Hart, 2000). The recent decades of the 21st century were marked by the easing of unification as the nation's destined goal and, as expected, the government established a more 'reconciliatory' stance in educating the younger members of society. Accordingly, greater emphasis was placed on successfully adopting the international values, thus focusing more on approaching matters of North Korea through a human rights-lenses or teaching the students about the economic development of the South and its ever-growing multicultural society, as noted by the Ministry of Education, 'The mission is to help young people become a democratic citizen capable of communicating with the world and outline their career goals after understanding their aptitude'¹¹.

Over the last decades, ROK's government has progressively changed its position and relation towards North Korea depending on its ever-changing political needs. Subsequently, the post-war period was followed by an intensive need for national value which led the South to construct the country's identity in opposition to North, whereas in the most recent years, South Korea has already established a defined understanding of 'self', both national and internationally, which resulted in a more sympathetic approach towards the North where the South actively engages in attempts to 'save' North Koreans from its 'misfortune'. Albeit the stance towards DPRK has fluctuated over the years, South Korea has undoubtedly successfully engaged in a nation-building process that cemented its national identity by demarking the difference between North and South Korea. By *othering* the North, the South was able to

¹¹ Ministry of Education > Education System > Secondary Education. (n.d.). <https://english.moe.go.kr/sub/infoRenewal.do?m=0303&page=0303&s=english>

construct a renewed national identity set under the contemporary values of democracy and a free market economy contrary to the oppressed nature of DPRK and, nowadays, South Koreans proudly advocate for their modern and advanced nation, both intentionally and unconsciously.

As in the majority of nations, national identity is a process that is perpetually built and reinforced by the members of its society through the emphasis on the nation's characteristics as opposed to the 'other'. In the context of South Korea, it is clear that such has been possible by distancing itself from the North, which proves to be extremely ambiguous considering the national narrative of ethnic ties and consequent need for unification.

4.5. A Hierarchy of Koreans

By now, it has become evident that a singular narrative on South Korean identity has been forming and has been vastly accepted by the majority of society as the people unintentionally integrate nationalist attitudes into their everyday lives. Even though the majority of these behaviors occur in unintentional circumstances, these actions encourage feelings of superiority that inevitably challenge inter-Korean relations. Accordingly, the hampered relationship between the two countries is extremely observable in the attitudes displayed towards North Korean defectors who renounced Kim Jong Un's regime and fled to South Korea anticipating an improvement in their quality of life as they hoped to integrate easily into a country that was once an equal part of North Korea. Nonetheless, South Korea changed and their attitudes towards their supposed counterparts did not remain the same.

As previously highlighted, throughout the history of the Korean Peninsula, a great emphasis and pride were placed under the belief in the nation's ethnic purity and its superiority when compared to other countries. Despite the terrible circumstances of the Japanese occupation, Korean nationalism persisted and proved to be detrimental in maintaining the people's endurance in order to resist their colonizer. This conviction on the nation's superiority was further challenged by the division of the peninsula amidst the Korean War, nonetheless, the emphasis placed upon ethnic and historical 'oneness' remained the main feature of unification narratives as the division was seen as a temporary measure in which all Koreans must endure and work towards the nation's common destiny.

Since the future holds a unified Korea, the rhetoric on unification is constructed under the umbrella of a vague but appealing future. Using vocabulary like 'brothers', 'dreams', 'destiny' and 'opportunity' (Son, 2016), it would be expected that attitudes towards defectors would depict these broadly positive discourses as "North Korean defector acceptance and

settlement is a natural and right process which is an important step towards a common destiny” (Son, 2016, p.175), however, the establishment of defectors in the South has proven to be remarkably more arduous than anticipated.

Upon arrival in South Korea, defectors go through a period of resettlement run by the South Korean government and are assigned a public rental home as well as a monthly allowance and receive the opportunity to have free education in public schools and universities¹². Nevertheless, despite all of the government efforts to facilitate defectors’ settlement in this foreign but similar country, the truth is that North Koreans suffer great discrimination which makes their stay in the South more complicated than anticipated. Combined with their severe psychological trauma from life in the North, which is often neglected and not given the attention it requires, there exists an “inability to adjust to a social system that revolves around a very different set of values. These values go beyond the ideological tension that characterized the political division, they are rooted in a much deeper sense of which has to do with people’s understanding of themselves and their relationship to society” (Bleiker, 2004, p.59). Regardless of the measures that the government implements in order to transition to a peaceful transition, North Korean defectors experience difficulties in adapting in an environment completely opposite from the totalitarian regime that they have lived in their entire life (Bleiker, 2004).

As South Korea grew and cemented its understanding of ‘self’ based on the ideas of consumerism and modernization that were previously analyzed, the seven decades of division inevitably resulted in major cultural differences between the two countries in which North Korean defectors do not seem to thrive. The globalized facet of South Korea has created a competitive society in which acceptance is measured through status and prestige, as one acquires knowledge in prominent universities, the likelihood of being accepted into a high-paying job increases and allows the individual to benefit from a higher degree of quality of life thus placing them on top of the hierarchy of the people of the South, whereas many defectors remain at the bottom of the ranking due to their lack of skills that are needed to thrive in this ambitious society, after all, ‘materially better off societies tend to have more open political systems that provide better education and use more advance technology’ (Ruiz & Park, 2008, p. 99). Lacking the social skills, not having a family as emotional and/or financial support and not dominating either technology or the English language, have proven to be a bigger impediment than anticipated and, for such, the unemployment rate for defectors is unsurprisingly high and their income awfully low (Bleiker, 2004).

¹² *Settlement support for North Korean defectors < What we do < 통일부_영문.* (n.d). 통일부. https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/whatwedo/support/

The adoption of the neo-liberal ideology has enhanced competitiveness among members of society where the corporate culture has constructed a hierarchy of Koreans within Koreans. Accordingly, at the top of the hierarchy, are born South Koreans who have managed to gain social status by themselves and, immediately after, are half-Koreans, usually Korean-Americans or Korean-Europeans, who enjoy a higher level of acceptance within society as they possess prestigious university diplomas and can contribute to the development of the nation, as opposed to North Korean defectors that are frequently placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy due to their condition as unskilled workers that are assigned to do the 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous, difficult), which are the contrary of modern and thus neglected by other members of society (Kim et. al 2010).

Moreover, Son (2016) tells us that “The acceptance of North Korean defectors has come to be framed as both a human rights and humanitarian response rather than purely a filial responsibility perhaps because it represents help for an ostensible ‘foreign’ people in need” (Son, 2016, p.178). As previously seen, as South Korea grows, there is a bigger need to act in accordance with international values and, due to such, the North Korean issue has been acquiring a more humanitarian and human rights approach that is consistent with the country’s growing presence as an international actor, namely, the settlement of defectors has “come to be variously framed in terms of helping suffering individuals in need without overt reference to their political or ethnic connection to the South” (Son, 2016: 179). Hence reflecting their moral superiority as a global actor and equally consolidating their identity as a separate entity that must help those who seek help, regardless of ethnic ties.

Despite the alleged common belief in ‘one nation’, the negative attitudes towards defectors, the embracement of foreigners into South Korean society and the humanitarian approach towards defectors have shown that ethnicity is no longer seen as the most crucial factor in defining national identity. Even though defector settlement is portrayed as a national obligation to deem unification more feasible, the truth is that North Koreans who flee their country lack the education that is needed to thrive in the South. This barrier to social and economic status creates negative images in the country they immigrated into and are usually portrayed as less sophisticated than modern South Koreans. This poorly image of North Koreans leads to discrimination where defectors experience a national identity crisis where they are seen as coming from the same ethnicity but are frequently excluded from main in-group activities. In addition, the creation of a contradictory image of North Koreans also represents an obstacle to the formulation of a coherent policy framework towards unification as alienation from this minority grows as opposed to the national narrative of familiarity.

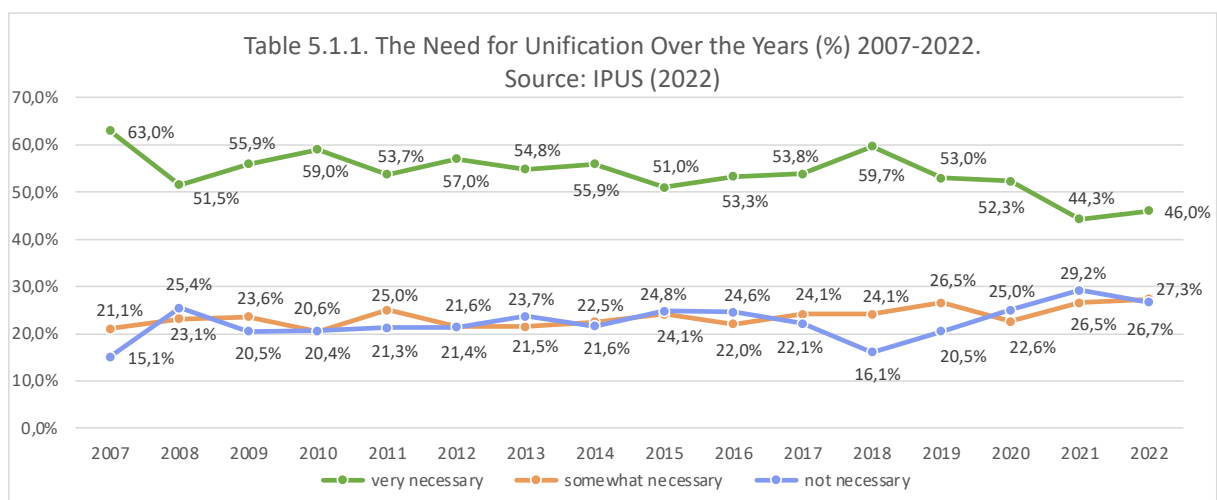
Chapter 5 - Data Analysis of Changing Attitudes Towards the North.

5.1. Attitudes towards Unification

The subsequent chapter will provide an analysis of the national perceptions of unification that will strengthen the empirical argumentation of this dissertation on the topic of national identities. As previously described in the methodology, to support and emphasize the premises of this work, the following chapter will present a data-based analysis of perceptions towards unification, collected by the national institution of Seoul National University's Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS).

The study of people's perception over a certain aspect of public life can be extremely challenging to analyze due to the high subjectivity, complexity and variability of the area of research inasmuch as it represents a multifaceted process that encompasses various individual differences such as personal beliefs or past experiences. Nonetheless, capturing the ways in which the Southern population perceives the North can be studied through the accumulation of data over the years, which allows researchers to discern the trends of feelings towards North Korea and, consequently, interpret the possibility of an eventual unification between the two countries. With that in mind, The Unification Perception Survey has gathered data from a total of 15 years regarding the collective need for unification and therefore provides a conducive contribution to the debate as it represents one of the most accurate representations of South Koreans' public opinion towards the North.

Starting with the primary issue of analysis, the following graphic illustrates the evolution of the *Need for Unification*, summarizing the response results over the last 15 years as 'Necessary', 'Somewhat Necessary' and 'Not Necessary' (Table 5.1.1). Accordingly, the results show that, throughout the years, the need for unification has been in constant decline, with the last two years of 2021 and 2022 displaying the lowest percentages for the need for



unification ever recorded where, respectively, only 44,6% and 46% of respondents said that unification was ‘necessary’ whereas, adversely, the number of respondents who believe that unification is ‘not necessary’ has equally registered the highest number documented since the beginning of the survey in 2007, with 29,4% of respondents answering that unification is not urgent in 2021 and 27,3% in 2022. With this graphic it becomes clear that the patterns for the need for unification fluctuate and are greatly influenced by the inter-Korean relations established in the designated year, in addition, we can equally notice that the results counterbalance each other, this meaning that, when positive dialogues between the two Koreas are made, the need for unification rises while the trends for non-support decline and vice-versa.

One great example of this is the case of 2018, a year characterized by the improvement of North-South relations where, for the first time since 2007, the then-President of South Korea, Moon Jae-In (2017-2022), entered North Korean territory and met with Kim Jong-Un, furthermore, this year was also remembered by the meeting of leader Kim Jong-Un with the USA’s then-President Donald Trump (2017-2021), becoming a historic event where, for the first time ever, a US President met with a North Korean leader. The year of 2018 was thus characterized by the improvement of inter-Korean relations which suggested a hopeful future for the two countries, this was evidenced in the adherence to the response option of ‘necessary’ when questioned about the need for unification in 2018, which is the year that has visibly received the highest percentage recorded since 2007, another memorable year for positive bilateral relations, whereas the option of ‘not necessary’ obtained its lowest ranking with only 16.1% of subjects considering unification as not urgent.

Nonetheless, as we have already seen, since 2018, inter-Korean relations have come to a halt due to several events that greatly strained the improved relationship between the two countries, these include postponed denuclearization talks, the renewal of missile launches and weapon tests, military provocations as well as border incidents caused by the North and the suspension of inter-Korean cooperation projects that had been previously agreed upon in order to foster and promote economic cooperation as well as to rebuild confidence between the two countries. These are some of the key events that reduced opportunities for collaboration and dialogue which, consequently, contributed to the decline of inter-Korean relations and led South Koreans to the growing support in not deeming unification as a national necessity. Additionally, it is also important to mention that the global pandemic of COVID-19 has also had a great impact upon the relationship shared between these nations as it reduced the opportunities for diplomatic contact.

Table 5.1.2. Need for Unification by Age Group.
2018-2022(%) Source: IPUS (2022)

‘Very Necessary’

Age Group	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
20s	13,3%	14,4%	7,6%	5%	6,1%
30s	17,3%	11,7%	16,8%	9,6%	7,3%
40s	23,2%	21,7%	23,0%	16,5%	13,4%
50s	27,2%	25,9%	28,0%	15,1%	18,6%
60s	24,6%	25,1%	26,9%	20,6%	23,8%

‘Not Necessary’

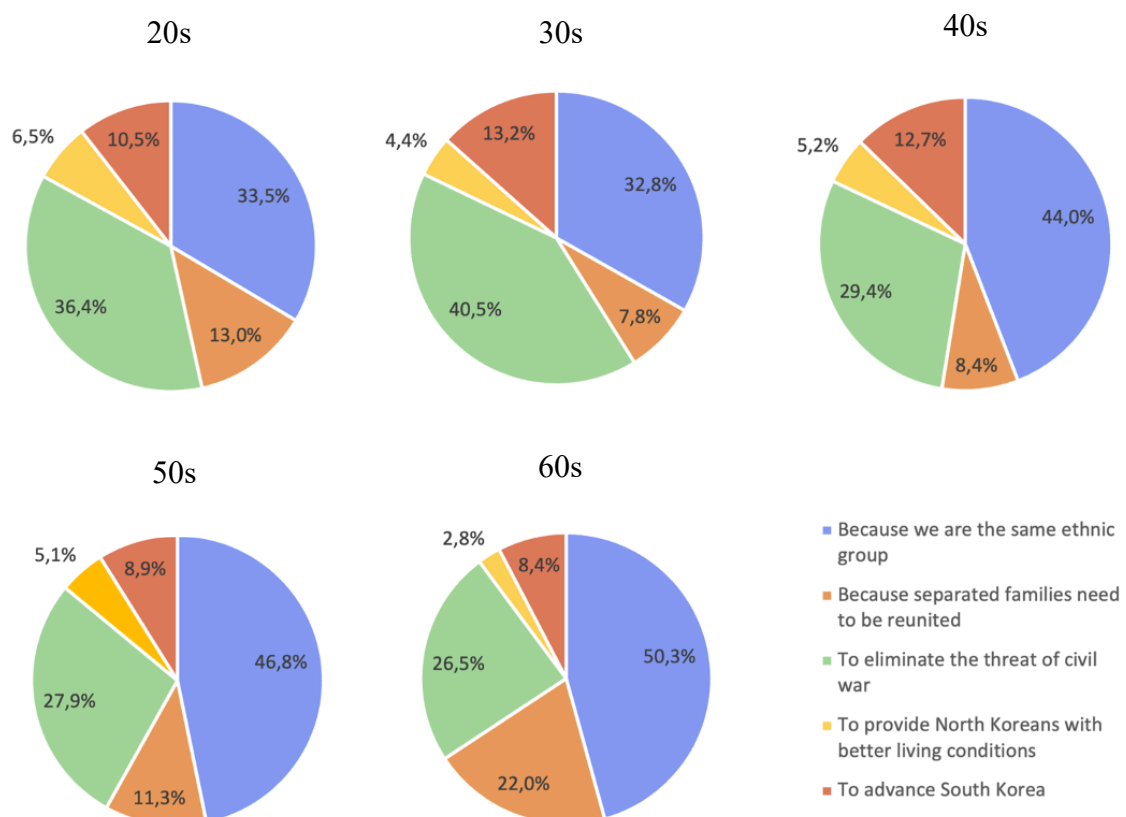
Age Group	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
20s	3,6%	7,7%	6,7%	6,8%	10,6%
30s	2,3%	3,4%	7,0%	5,8%	8,1%
40s	1,1%	4,6%	2,8%	3,7%	4,9%
50s	1,2%	2,5%	5,8%	4,3%	3,0%
60s	5,2%	6,2%	2,8%	4,0%	3,9%

Through this analysis, it becomes clear that negative perceptions towards unification have continued to increase in recent years and, according to Table 5.1.2, one can grasp how younger generations tend to display a growing, as well as constant, detachment from the need to unite with the North. The retrieved data illustrates how there is an increasing disconnection among younger layers of society towards this topic as, in 2018, 13,3% of those in their 20s deemed unification as ‘very necessary’ whereas in 2022, the same number receded drastically and currently only 6,1% of young adults regard the topic as urgent. Alternatively, when referring to unification as ‘not necessary at all’, the generation that displays higher percentages in this category are those in their 20s once again, revealing that there is, in fact, a feeling of disassociation from the North brewing among younger South Koreans. Nonetheless, albeit older generations do not display such dramatic numbers, we can verify that the need for unification has been decreasing in all generations, even if just slightly, which is descriptive of the decline in inter-Korean relations (Table 5.1.2). Although in deterioration, it is equally important to analyze the reasons behind support for unification according to different age groups as it is quite illustrative of the contrasting attitudes among these generations towards the topic, which provides us with improved insight into the aspects that are more valuable to each generation. Following the data selected in Table 5.1.3, it is evident that the younger members of society support unification based on pragmatic reasons, this meaning that these members of society

justify the need for unification on practical terms such as ‘to become a more advanced country’ or ‘to eliminate the threat of war’ whilst those in their 50s and 60s tend to adopt a more normative position by justifying the need for unification based on moral terms such as ‘because we are the same ethnic group’ or ‘because separated families need to be reunited’ (IPUS, 2016). Accordingly, the proportion of people in their 20s and 30s that justified their reasonings based on ethnic motives is of 35,5% and 32,8%, respectively, while 46,8% and 50,3% of those in their 50s and 60s chose common ancestry as the most important reason for unification. On an opposite note, the younger layers of society defined the reduction of insecurity as the prominent reason, selected by 36,4% and 40,5% of younger respondents, whereas only 27,9% and 26,5% of those 50s or older deemed this factor as crucial.

These results denote, once again, a clear distinction among generations and indicate that younger members of society approach unification concerns with a more practical attitude while older generations tend to exhibit a moral reasoning that falls in accordance with the nationalistic tendencies that were previously mentioned. Due to their direct contact with the Korean War

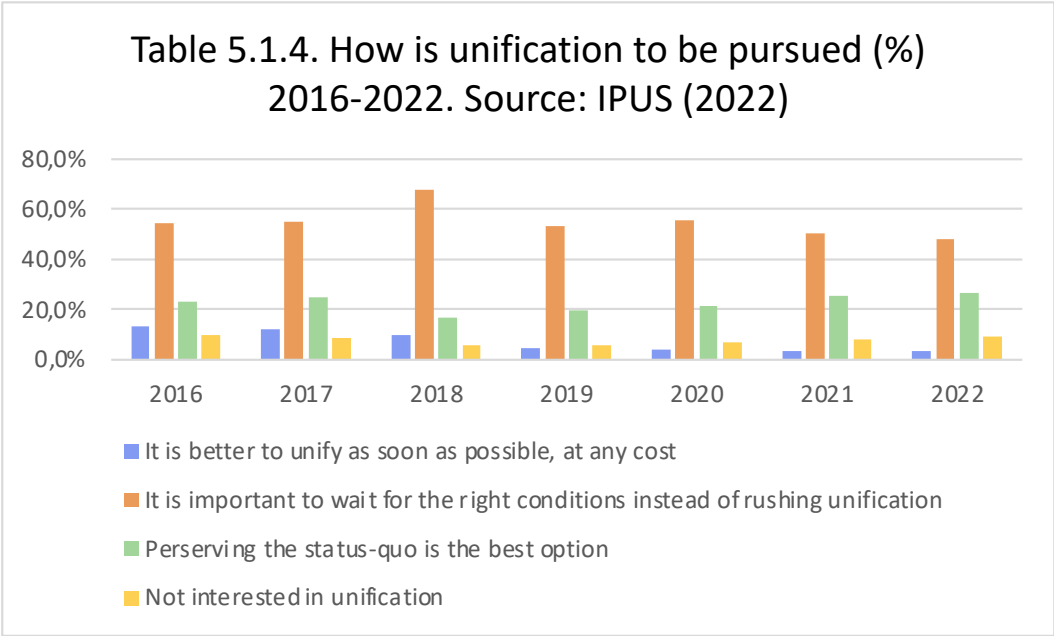
Table 5.1.3. Reasons given for the necessity of unification by age groups (%), 2022. Source: IPUS (2022)



and the effective separation of the two nations, the older generations present a more sympathetic attitude towards the North as the emphasis placed on *danil minjok* was substantially higher as they were growing up whereas, on younger generations, the emphasis is placed on embracing multiculturalism. It is apparent that, over the last decade, public consensus towards supporting unification policies is becoming more multifaceted as well as hopes for a feasible and peaceful unification of the two countries seem to be fleeting.

Considering Table 5.1.4, one begins to see how the numbers for supporting unification ‘at any cost’ have not only dropped drastically by 10%, representing only 3,2% of respondents, as well as the number of participants who prefer the preservation of the current system of a separate North and South Korea continues to widen since 2016.

Although the proportion of participants who believe that unification must ‘wait for the conditions to mature’ has been, in all of the selected years, the most selected option, one can recognize that this category has also been in decline since 2018, the year when it reached its peak with 68% of respondents choosing this option as their number one preference, as opposed



to the 20% regression registered in 2022, representing the lowest percentage ever recorded in this category. Nevertheless, even though 48% of participants have selected ‘waiting for better conditions’ as the favored outline of unification, we must keep in mind this category’s decline does not mean that respondents prefer unification to occur now or anytime soon but in reality, favors the understanding that South Koreans do not wish for the merger of the two countries. This meaning that the combination of the decline in support of the expectation of better conditions to arrive and the rise of wishing to maintain the status quo of co-existence between the North and the South reveals that South Koreans are, as expected, becoming more indifferent toward unification matters and favor the ongoing political circumstances where both countries co-exist as separate entities.

To supplement this premise, the following tables and graphics demonstrate how this significant sample of South Koreans feels considering the possibility of unification in terms of timing and eventual systems to adopt and, as anticipated, the results do not favor the consolidation of the two countries. In Table 5.1.5 we can witness how the hope for unification as a potential short-term possibility to occur in the next 10 years has dropped from 23.5% in 2007 to a mere 5.9% of respondents who believe that such is a possible outcome. Subsequently, the number of participants who believe that unification is not possible has almost tripled over the years from 13.3% to 31.6%. Additionally, we can also see in Figure 6.5 how, when asked about the timing of unification, the option of ‘never’ is the most selected one in all of the present generations, only with the exception of those in their 50s (Table 6.5).

Figure 5.1.5. Years to Unification (%) 2007 – 2022.

Source: IPUS (2022)

	In 5 years	In 10 years	In 20 years	In 30 years	More than 30 years	Never
2007	3,7%	23,5%	30,8%	14,0%	13,8%	13,3%
2008	2,3%	13%	22,1%	15,5%	24,9%	22,4%
2009	2,8%	16,9%	27,6%	16,2%	16,5%	19,8%
2010	3,4%	17,8%	24,1%	13,4%	20,8%	20,6%
2011	2,5%	16,3%	26,1%	14%	19,8%	21,3%
2012	2,9%	15,5%	25,9%	17,8%	19,8%	19,2%
2013	3,7%	13,3%	25,3%	13,7%	18,3%	25,8%
2014	2,1%	13,7%	22,8%	18,2%	19,7%	23,5%
2015	3,5%	17,8%	25,5%	13,9%	19,6%	19,7%
2016	3,5%	14%	25,1%	15,1%	17,9%	24,4%
2017	2,3%	13,6%	23,1%	16%	20,1%	24,7%
2018	6,3%	25,7%	28%	13,3%	12,5%	14%
2019	3,6%	17,9%	24,8%	18,7%	15%	20%
2020	2,4%	11,7%	25,2%	16,7%	18,9%	25,1%
2021	1,3%	7,9%	20%	20%	25,2%	25,6%
2022	1,3%	5,9%	17,8%	17,8%	25,1%	31,6%

Table 5.1.6. When will Unification occur? (%) by age group, 2022. Source: IPUS (2022)

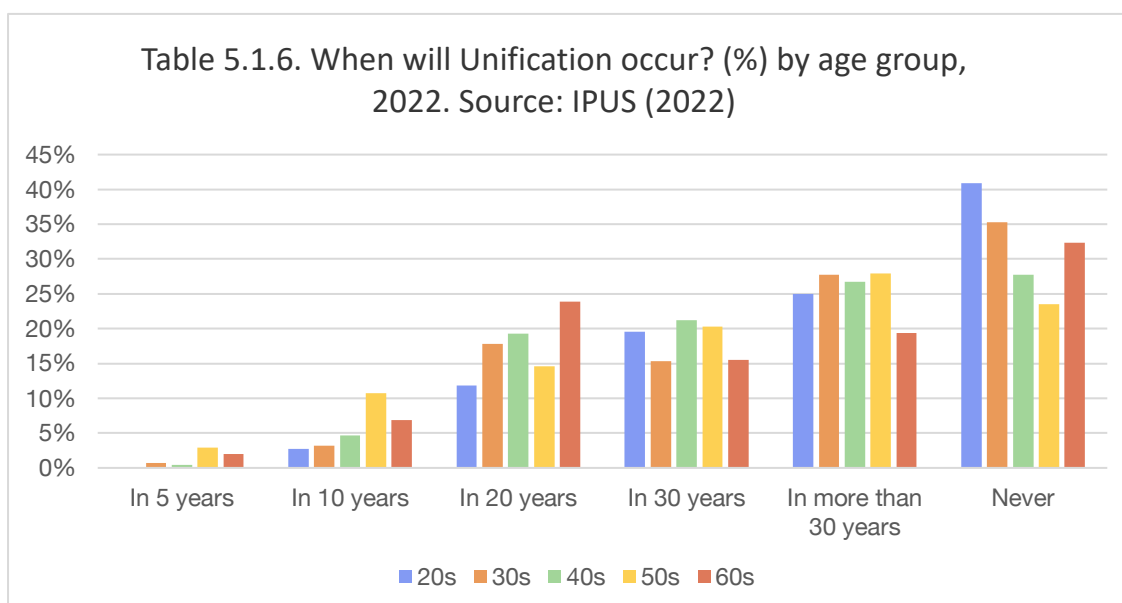
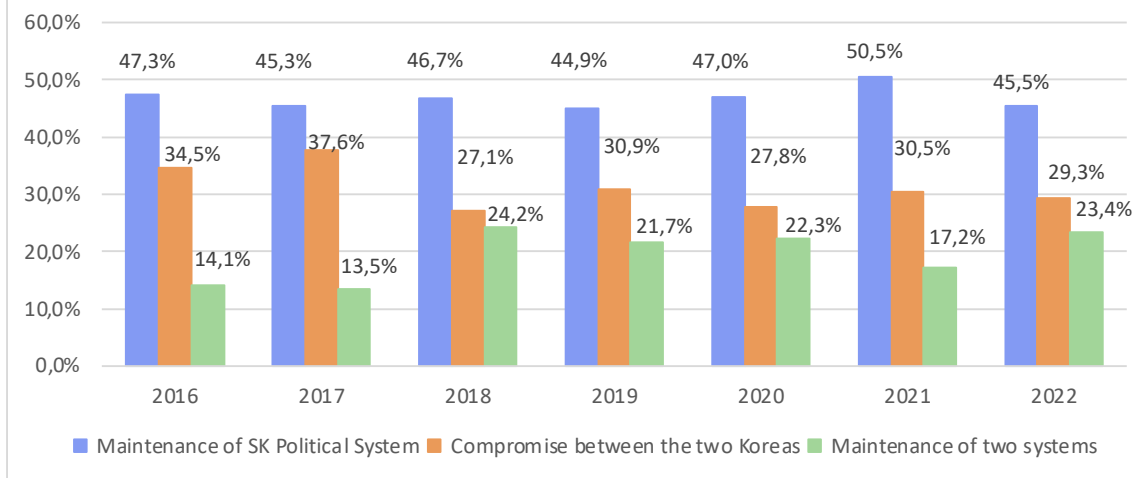


Table 5.1.7. Preferred form of unification (%) 2016-2022.

Source: IPUS (2022)



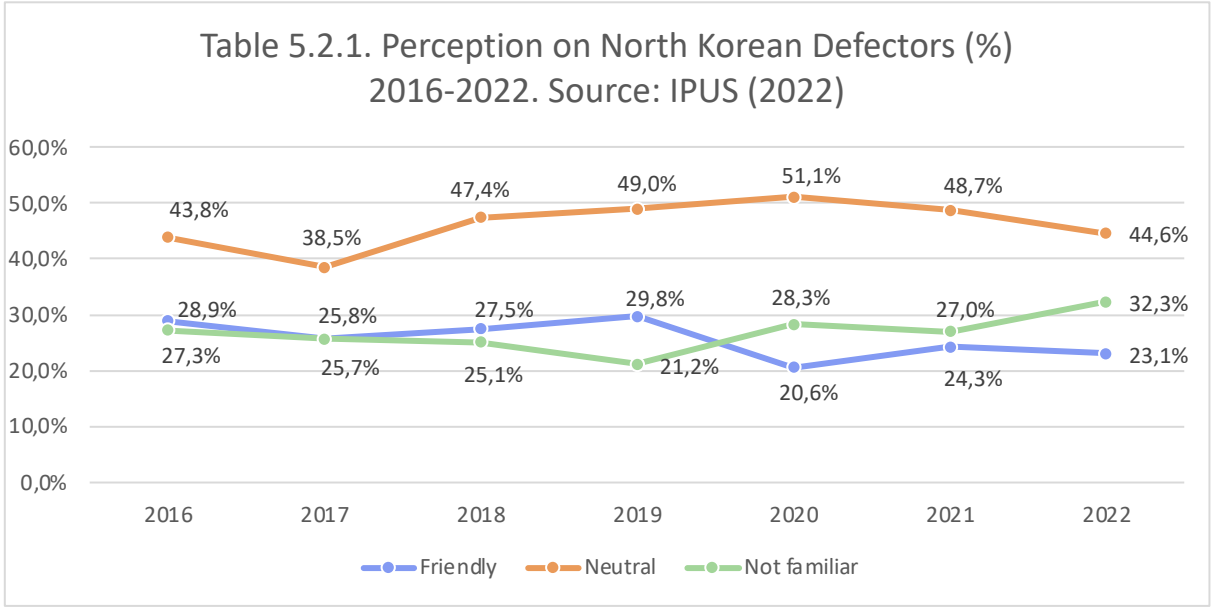
Despite this evident and growing tendency of not wanting to unite with the North, the national survey still asked the participants if, in the case of unification, ‘What kind of system do you think a unified Korea should have?’, whose responses are represented in Table 5.1.7. According to the graphic, the preferred form of unification has been, without a doubt, ‘the maintenance of South Korea’s current system’, representing nearly half of the responses every year, followed by the second most popular response, an eventual ‘compromise between the two Koreas’, nonetheless, in the wake of deteriorating inter-Korean relations, this response has significantly dropped and preference for the ‘maintenance of the two systems’ is generally on the rise, almost surpassing the previous option with 23,4% of respondents favoring the maintenance of the current system division.

These results exhibit that the attitudes towards the possible outcome of a unified Korea have been consistent with one another and demonstrate how, as South Koreans grow accustomed to their modern lifestyle, the chances of wanting to unity with the North are greatly reduced. The negative prospects towards the possibility of unification and the inclination to maintain the current political system are more present within the younger layers of society, which strengthens the main argumentation of this dissertation as it suggests that negative perceptions towards the possibility of unification are spreading quickly among younger members of society. Nonetheless, the analyzed data has also unexpectedly reported that this pessimistic outlook towards the possibility of a single Korea is equally present in older generations despite the importance given to the historical past shared between the two countries.

5.2. Attitudes towards North Korea

As we have already seen, for a country to be classified as a nation, its population must share a common feeling of belonging and identification with one another. For this reason, it remains crucial to interpret the ways in which South Koreans perceive the North and the members of its society as, through the analysis of the attitudes towards North Korea and its defectors, one can acquire an improved insight into the issue of unification in the sense that it allows one to discern if a shared identity is a realistic possibility or if it represents an enclave to unification.

According to the Ministry of Unification, in 2022, there was a total of 33,916 North Korean defectors living in South Korea¹³. With a total population of almost 52 million people, North Korean defectors represent a minority in South Korea yet, these citizens possess a different denomination when compared with other foreigners due to the historical ties that these two nations share. Considering the importance of national unity, we will now evaluate South Koreans’ perceptions and feelings toward the North.



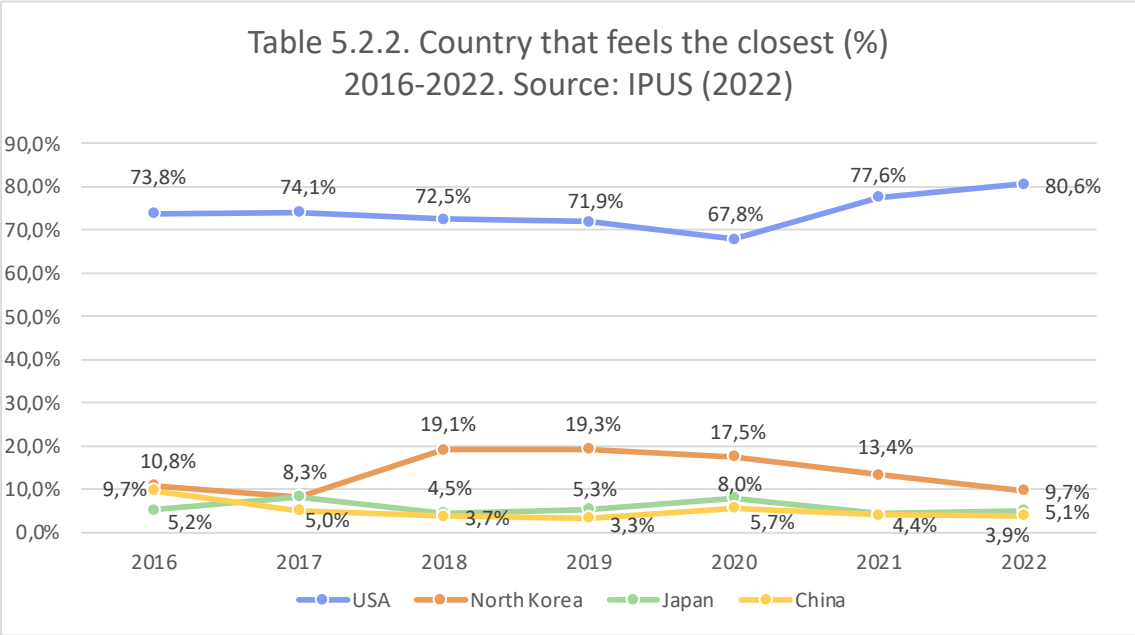
As it is clear from Table 5.2.1, familiarity with North Korean defectors has been declining since hitting its peak in 2018, the year characterized by the improvement of inter-Korean relations, nonetheless, as verified in previous discussions, the deterioration of this relationship in the following years has consequently deteriorated national sense of proximity with the North and, as if 2022, the number of participants who do not feel familiar with its

¹³ Ministry of Unification (n.d) *Policy on North Korean Defectors*. https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors/.

neighboring country has risen to 32,3%, the highest number recorded since 2016, and more than 10% higher than the percentage of those who consider North Koreans defectors as friendly, which is of 23,1%.

When asked the question ‘Which Country do you Feel Closer To?’ we can see that the USA has evidently been the nation to whom South Koreans feel more connected with. Despite being a completely different culture with different life philosophies, history, traditions, cuisine and even language, a remarkable number of 80% of the respondents consider the country on the other side of the globe more similar than the country with whom they share an eventful past.

Following the United States, comes North Korea in second with a significantly lower percentage of only 9,7%. These controversial results suggest that, over the years, South Koreans have been experiencing more of what is called the ‘North Korean Fatigue’ where, after enduring decades of considerable hostility and threats from their so-called ‘brothers’, South Koreans have reached a point of exhaustion where they no longer see North Korea as an alarming threat and, at the same time, they do not feel connected nor interested in improving governmental efforts to cement the prospects of national unity.



The purpose of this chapter was to interpret the available data concerning South Koreans' perception towards North Korea in order to see if positive attitudes regarding their Northern counterparts are present, as a more open approach towards North Koreans and their country would lead to a higher sense of collective identity and, consequently, would facilitate the unification process. Nonetheless, the national surveys tell us that the deterioration of

bilateral relations between the two countries has unavoidably undermined the hopes for an eventual unified Korean identity.

The selected data illustrates that, since 2016, a growing alienation towards the North is evidently present in South Korea's population and it is highly likely that this trend persists. Although diversion from younger members of society was anticipated, the results exhibit a tendency to distance from the North within all age groups, which represents a challenge to governmental attempts aimed at promoting national unity between the two countries. While it is clear that the national consciousness of unification fluctuates each year depending on the degree of inter-Korean relations and the international setting of the respective year, it is equally evident that the 2020s are being marked by the decline in the need for unification throughout the majority of South Korea's population, albeit with higher rates among the younger members of society. This declining interest in unification matters on behalf of those in their 20s contrasts highly with the past generation of revolutionary university students of the 1960s which were characterized by their nationalistic fervor that led them to actively fight for a single and unified Korea in various rallies against the government.

As this chapter has provided solid empirical data demonstrating that the idea of unification is becoming more utopian as the years pass, it remains critical to analyze and establish the reasons behind this opposition to the unification of the two Koreas, as the following chapter will do. Through the analysis and understanding of the motives for not engaging in unification measures, we can provide an increased understanding of what differentiates South Koreans from North Koreans and, ultimately, discern if, after 70 years, the possibility for unification is still a feasible, and desired, occurrence to take place in the following decades.

Chapter 6

Growing Apart? A Final Discussion of the Results and Future Prospects on Unification

The present work aimed at analyzing nationalism and questions of identity in the particular case of the Korean Peninsula due to its unique characteristics and overlooked relevance to the study of national identities. Although great research has been made on this topic, the majority of the literature is either centered around the hardships of defectors' settlement in the South or focuses on the importance of ethnic nationalism within the Korean nation thus neglecting the national-identity-building processes that are arising south of the border of the demilitarized zone. When authors do direct their attention towards the complexity of South Korean nationalism their work, although extremely advantageous and fruitful to the discussions of national identity, remains outdated as current inter-Korean relations and world events of the last years have had a great impact in influencing Korean nationalism. This being said, the present study proposed to address this gap in the literature where, by analyzing the perceptions of unification between 2016 and 2022, it was expected to provide an up-to-date perspective that combines multiple components of critical importance to the identity-building process and offer a revised insight on the Korean case.

The results exhibited by the quantitative data in the previous chapter evidence that, between 2016 and 2022, the relationship between North and South Korea has been continually declining and, where these nations once viewed themselves as one under shared ethnicity, South Koreans now feel more connected to Western societies than to those above the 38th parallel (Table 5.2.2). This intriguing, yet contradictory, situation that South Koreans find themselves in where common history and traditions are no longer sufficient to create a homogeneous and harmonious collective national identity between the two nations, ultimately challenges ethnic nationalism narratives and produces compelling questions such as what has led to the creation of a separate identity to take place and, consequently, what are the elements that compose this new identity as well as its impacts on the discourses of unification. Respectively, these were the questions that this research hoped to clarify.

The results from the retrieved data confirm that since 2016, but more predominantly since 2018, public opinion towards unification has hit an all-time low marked by a constant and growing alienation from the North. The present dissertation has argued that this increased estrangement is a product of the emergence of a singular South Korean identity that has been calmly developing since the country was forcibly introduced to the international sphere. This

new contemporary form of South Korean identity has been constructed upon the complex relationship that the country shares with globalization. Hence, as South Korea began to participate more actively in international trade, the country experienced an economic revolution that transformed the nation and positioned the country amongst the most important actors in the international arena. The primary objective of this work was to demonstrate how, over the last decades, the enhanced position in the global hierarchy led to increased inter-cultural exchanges that fundamentally resulted in the creation of a separate South Korean national identity characterized by multiculturalism, consumerism, political awareness and, more importantly, separation from the North.

In addition to the sentiment of growing distance from the North, the data analysis also indicated that this distance was mostly perceived within the younger generations of 20s and 30s years old, which can also be explained by the same globalization flows. Respectively, the generational differences that are present in the national surveys are the outcome of the development of this renewed identity. The contemporary youth of South Korea grew up under the years of prosperity and financial abundance of the nation where the revival of the middle class created a new lifestyle characterized by the consumption of goods and made the employment market more competitive as these young adults strived to maintain their social status, which is often equated to an individual's economic success. As it has been elaborated, the globalization movements to which South Korea has been exposed to have had an enormous impact in shaping the renewed 'self' of the country and, over time, the partition of the nation into two distinct countries inevitably exposed South Korean society to new patterns of behavior, socialization, consumption and other factors that fundamentally shaped the way in which these younger members of society view themselves. Furthermore, the use of social media and the constant interaction with other cultures ultimately contributed to the creation of a South Korean identity characterized by its level of 'development', which explains the perceived closeness with countries like the USA and consequent distance from North Korea.

In this light, the data analysis has thus evidenced that the most recent generation of young adults in South Korea are moving away from the long-established discourses of ethnic-based identity and are slowly discarding the need for unification as the Peninsula's 'destiny' that must be fulfilled. While older generations, such as those in their 60s and higher, exhibit different attitudes towards unification and the North due to their close experiences with the Korean War, or those in their 40s and 50s, which were highly influenced by the implemented measures of the Sunshine Policy (1998-2008), the most recent generation of contemporary 20-years old have predominantly lived on the environment of the 21st century which often

emphasizes social status and financial prestige. These generational differences are unmistakably present when one considers the reasons given for the necessity of unification, where it is evident that the majority of younger members of society would support unification primarily to diminish the threat of war as opposed to older generations who view unification with more of a Korean nationalism approach (Table 5.1.3).

Nonetheless, despite these higher percentages evidently more present in the young adults category, the data has also demonstrated that the declining interest in unifying with the North is a sentiment that is slowly, and steadily, growing in all generations. Respectively, the constant decline in the need for unification (Table 5.1.1) and the attitudes displayed towards North Korean defectors are all indicators that the country is entering a new phase where unification is no longer seen as a national unnegotiable necessity, but rather as a 70-year-old issue that is losing its impact in society.

When one analyzes the values of this new contemporary South Korean identity, it thus becomes apparent that globalization has widened the gap of identification with the North as these young adults are now more focused on issues that maintain both their social status, by studying abroad to acquire cultural experiences, or by learning English to display their cosmopolitanism, as well as increase the nation's reputation by becoming more involved in global issues. This research has shown that the modern characteristics of contemporary South Korea have shaped the way in which these young adults think of themselves thus transforming the national narrative into one that is more concerned with status, both national and internationally, rather than interested in unification issues that would, most likely, damage severely the prosperity of their nation. In this light, the collective 'self' of South Korea has been slowly constructed under these distinct narratives and ultimately, for a nation to understand who belongs to the 'we', it must equally determine who composes the 'other' and, contrary to a considerate amount of scholars, this dissertation argues that South Korea has managed to present itself as the 'developed' and modern Korea by *othering* the North.

The premises formulated by Shin (2006) and Lee (2006), both highly respected intellectuals on the debate of Korean nationalism, argue that the globalization flows act as intensifiers of ethnic nationalism, this meaning that the social disruptions caused by globalization would ultimately lead to increased feelings of national solidarity against outside forces that disrupt the national cause. However, unlike these arguments, the present work provided a more up-to-date analysis of current inter-Korean relations and ultimately demonstrated how the 'golden years' of ethnic nationalism have come to an end.

Respectively, the ROK's government has actively partaken in actions that formally exclude the North from their understanding of 'self' both unconsciously, through everyday actions of banal nationalism, and through formal practices, such as the construction of North Koreans in national textbooks as 'evil' and 'oppressed' in contrast to the 'heroic' and 'free' South Korea. While these authors do acknowledge the existing generational differences in supporting unification, they assert that the modernization processes to which South Korea has been exposed to have not diluted Korean nationalism. However, the central premise of this dissertation fundamentally sustains that ethnic homogeneity is no longer a sufficient trait to belong to the nation as half-Koreans who contribute to the development of the nation integrate more easily into society as opposed to North Korean defectors who remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy due to their lack of sophistication, as it is evidenced in the declining perception of North Korea defectors in Table 5.2.1. The present dissertation has rejected these perspectives and has equally reinforced Campbell's (2016), Kim et. al (2015) or Ha and Jang, (2016) contributions by demonstrating how globalization has had a greater impact than previously anticipated and that the seventy-year-long conflict has created an unforeseen division that cannot be mended by persistence on ethnic homogeneity as the driver for the unification of two contrasting nations.

While, between 2016 and 2018, the improved inter-Korean relations provided a positive outlook on unification where the cooperation between the two countries, as well as the dialogue between North Korea and the USA, created hopeful ambitions throughout the international sphere. The last four years have been characterized by the deterioration of the bilateral relationship between the two Koreas and, consequently, the strengthening of the exclusive form of South Korean national identity.

Marked by a sense of frustration towards North Korea's actions in the international sphere, the diplomatic efforts for peaceful cooperation advanced by the South have often been discarded and resisted by Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un which, consequently, led the people of the South to develop a certain wariness towards the 70-year-old conflict. The setback in denuclearization talks as well as constant military threats and various incidents alongside the border of the two countries resulted in the escalation of inter-Korean tensions and inevitably led to the decline of bilateral relations. As a consequence, although the population of South Korea clearly feels threatened by the nuclear power of its neighboring country, they have equally reached a level of frustration towards cooperation efforts where the lack of partnership on behalf of North Korea has ultimately resulted in the decline of the South's willingness to unify, which is reflected on the declining need for unification (Table 5.1.1).

One may argue that national perceptions of unification fluctuate according to the degree of inter-Korean relations of the respective year and that the last four years of negative association towards the North will eventually rise, nonetheless, since 2016, South Korea has had a constant and growing influence in the international sphere that grows in consonance as its fatigue and alienation from the North increase. Consequently, the results have shown that younger and future members of society do not view unification as an urgent matter and would rather relocate their focus onto domestic issues that affect their country rather than speculative unification measures that fluctuate every newly elected presidential administration.

Respectively, another instance that illustrates this shift in attitudes towards the North has been the case of the joint Korean hockey team during the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. As previously disclosed, 2018 was the year of flourishing inter-Korean relations where dialogues and initiatives between the two countries reached unprecedented levels, culminating on the creation of a unified hockey team composed of both North and South Korean athletes playing under the Korean Unification Flag. This effort to bring the two countries under a single nation was advanced by former ROK's President, Moon Jae-In (2017-2022), known for his complainant stance towards the North, but eventually proved to be detrimental to his career as it sparked great controversies within the South. According to an opinion poll, 72% of the respondents opposed the creation of a joint hockey team and the criticism was even higher among the younger generation, as the rate of opposition between people in their 20s and 30s was of 82%¹⁴. This controversy led to the decline in support for President Moon and opened the doors for the administration of the current President, Yoon Suk-Yeol, who has acquired a more robust position on foreign policy, focusing on improving relations with other countries and international organizations such as NATO, and who, unlike its predecessor, has acquired a more conservative stance towards North Korea.

Accordingly, President Yoon has advocated for the democratization-first principle, which imposes the complete denuclearization of North Korea before unification dialogues take place. This firmer position against the North was further translated into the 2023 official edition of the Unification White Paper, which directly accused North Korea's provocative acts as the main perpetrator for escalating tensions on the Peninsula. Moreover, it is also important to notice the choice of wording in this official paper as it represents, once again, a case of *othering*. In previous years, the need to denuclearize was always referred to as the Peninsula's need to

¹⁴ Gregory, S. (2018, January 17). North Korea aligning with South Korea for the Winter Olympics is already causing controversy. *Time*. <https://time.com/5106422/north-south-korea-olympics-controversy/>

denuclearize, as opposed to the current year which directly accounts the North Korean regime for the perceived instability, therefore removing itself from the behaviors of the North.

These acts of negative attitudes towards the joint 'Korea' hockey team and the election of an administration that is ambitiously focused on improving its global position are more evidence that the South Korean society, especially those in their 20s and 30s as the national surveys indicate, view the process of unification as undesirable, for they are more likely concerned with pressing national issues that are currently affecting their everyday lives, such as unemployment or housing prices, rather than uniting with a country that seems foreign to them. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the current foreign policy that the South Korean government is pursuing to augment its position as a global player, ultimately contrasts with unification inclinations as ethnic homogeneity discourses are fundamentally incompatible with the efforts of creating a multicultural and 'developed' South Korea.

The outcomes of the present research demonstrate that, following the signed armistice of the Korean War, South Korea has been an active participant in international trade and, since then, ROK's government began to enjoy a significant degree of economic prosperity which ultimately functioned as a cataclysm to the development of a national identity exclusive to the South. The insertion into the global market allowed the previous 'hermit kingdom' to experience consistent inter-cultural exchanges with other nations which resulted in two different but interlocked practices. Firstly, as South Korea acquired more prestige in the international sphere, it was deemed necessary to act under the values preached by the most influential members of the international community. Accordingly, the government focused on implementing a more human-rights-focused agenda, which ultimately led the country to publicly distance itself as a separate entity from the cruel acts of the North. Secondly, the expansion of technologies and increased financial conditions allowed the members of the South to perpetuate cultural exchanges with other nations, which has decisively impacted the construction of 'self' within the younger members of society that grew under contemporary South Korea, who are now more focused in themes that provide them with social status in their daily lives and equally bring international prestige to their country.

The analysis of the patterns of national perception towards the North through use of data provided by IPUS demonstrates that, since 2016, there has been a constant evolution of decreasing commitment to the need for unification, which is followed by a growing sense of proximity towards nations such as the USA, which is simultaneously highly controversial due to centuries of shared past with the North, but equally anticipated due to the globalization trends that enabled the flow of material goods and values. The outcomes of this research reveal

impending consequences for the future of the Korean Peninsula. Accordingly, the current progression in distance from the North has shown no sign of stalling since 2018 and has increased greatly ever since. Moreover, the current panorama of inter-Korean relations has hit an all-time-low with not only both ROK and DPRK interrupting communications with one another, as well as, as seen in Table 5.2.1, North Korean defectors have continually faced tremendous difficulties in integrating below the 38th parallel as South Koreans perceive them not as ‘brothers’ but rather as immigrants from a completely different culture.

While it is not asserted that unification will unequivocally not occur in the future, the present work has demonstrated that, considering the development of a South Korean national identity that clearly does not include the North and the current panorama of inter-Korean relations, the possibility of a unified Korea remains, at the time, a highly unlikely outcome as the South’s willingness to unify remains scarce. The growing alienation from the North as a consequence of the formation of an independent national identity is further reinforced by the attitudes registered towards unification itself as the expanding estrangement from identification with the North evidently challenges the feasibility of unification. The possible impacts that South Korean national identity has had on the future of a unified Korea are highly noticeable when one considers that, more predominantly since 2018, there has been a growing preference for the maintenance of the current system of peaceful coexistence between the two countries rather than pursuing unification (Table 5.1.4), or that, since 2007, the belief that unification is not a possible outcome has triplicated over the years (Table 5.1.5). These results thus corroborate the understanding that the seven decades of division have created an identity gap perpetuated by globalization that deeply challenges the possibility of an eventual unification between the two contrasting nations.

Moreover, the eventual establishment of one Korea is not entirely dependent upon the unification of the North and South under one equal system. Naturally, for a nation to thrive, it remains important that the members of its society are clearly defined under a common understanding of ‘we’. However, the following dissertation has demonstrated that the South has moved away from the long-established understandings of ethnic nationalism and created a modern conception of ‘self’ in which North Koreans have a difficult time viewing themselves in. It is inadequate to assume that a common identity would develop if unification was to take place, especially when the data indicates that 76,9% of the respondents either feel ‘neutral’ or ‘not familiar’ towards defectors as opposed to the old national narrative of North Koreans as ‘brothers’ (Table 5.2.2). This being said, the analysis of South Korean public sentiment and the overall governmental position towards North Korea reveals that there exists a constant

estrangement from identification with the North, which would make the establishment of policies that promote shared 'Koreanness' extremely difficult as South Koreans no longer view their co-nationals as equal.

The results of this research provide crucial premises for the future of a unified Korea. It is important to discern that, once again, it is not disclosed that unification is impossible, but it is rather asserted that, by establishing a link between globalization, nationalism and the bilateral relations between the two countries, the present dissertation has demonstrated how the South has actively undergone a process of nation-formation that excludes the North, which suggests that unification is highly unlikely due to the current sequence of events. Moreover, the arguments here defended challenge directly a considerable amount of literature on Korean nationalism as it questions the relevance of ethnic nationalism and *danil minjok* in contemporary South Korea. Contrary to what was reiterated by other scholars, the importance of blood ties has been diluted and lost its significance over the years, as students once actively demanded their government for more effective unification policies, the contemporary youth of the South shows no interest in these matters, especially due to the financial struggles that they would have to endure if unification was to take place. While it is not alleged that all members of society share this opinion, the statistical data and the development of an exclusive South Korean national identity that has been entrenched over the years through the use of flags, national anthems, textbooks and even national news, demonstrates that Korean identity remains a complex question that is dependent upon a series of interconnected topics. Nonetheless, the seven decades of division have created greater barriers than anticipated and the nation that was once defined by the prominence of its ethnic ties, no longer views ethnicity as the main indicator of what it means to be Korean.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

The present dissertation aimed to provide its readers with an improved insight into the contexts of contemporary South Korea to fathom the current dynamics of national identity and ultimately analyze if unification is still a feasible solution or if the future holds a divided Korea where ambiguous behaviors reign the bilateral exchanges between the two countries. The link between national identity and globalization in South Korea remains an unexplored area that this dissertation aimed to fill as the majority of the literature on the topic remains quite outdated and does not include the current affairs of inter-Korean relations, thus not providing a revised argument that considers the recent events that ultimately shape Korean nationalism nowadays. Considering the research problem and questions that were defined at the beginning of the dissertation, the following can be asserted.

Through the analysis of national surveys combined with the study of the current South Korean understanding of ‘self’, the fundamental assumption of this research has shown that it can be affirmed that we are, in fact, witnessing the development of a South Korean national identity. The present research has made efforts to unravel the motives behind the growing decline in the trends for supporting unification and has demonstrated that, with the insertion of South Korea in the international sphere, the people of the South, and the government itself, initiated a process of nation-building that would soon exclude their previous co-nationals from their understanding of ‘self’. Accordingly, the economic globalization of the country allowed the recently formed nation to partake in inter-cultural exchanges that not only improved the country’s economic situation, transforming South Korea from a war-torn country that was heavily dependent on foreign aid to one of the most successful economies in the world, but has also unmistakably shaped the ways in which the people of the South view themselves, which leads us to the second research question that inquires the elements that compose this reestablished South Korean identity.

Ultimately, the emergence of a South Korean identity is the product of the impact of globalization on society. As South Korea began to participate more actively in the international sphere, the constant interaction with other nations allowed the country to compare itself with others and recognize that it would need to rebrand itself in order to improve its place on the global hierarchy. This rebranding of South Korea from isolated and obsessed with blood ties to a globalized actor that embraces modernity, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism has been cemented over the years and has led to the creation of a South Korean ‘self’ that is characterized by the consumption of luxury goods, experiences abroad and ‘developed’ in the sense that it is

a nation that is concerned with the contemporary problems that reign modern societies, such as climate action or gender equality. In addition, the data suggests that this disassociation from the North is predominantly more felt among younger South Koreans who, unlike past generations, view unification not as a precondition to achieve the nation's destiny, but rather as an undesirable outcome that would result in social and economic complications which, ultimately, would disrupt the prosperity that they have been wanting to achieve.

This dissertation has demonstrated that, as South Koreans become more accustomed to their capitalist lifestyle, they widen their distance from the North and ultimately construct their understanding of 'self' as opposed to the North Korean 'other' that does not have the same experiences as contemporary South Koreans. This distance has been perpetuated through both conscious and unintentional everyday practices and, inevitably, this disconnection from the North is visible in the way South Koreans treat defectors, often discarding them due to their financial disadvantages and lack of 'modernity'. Considering the negative attitudes towards defectors, the establishment of an independent South Korean national identity and the panorama of the declining inter-Korean relationship, the present dissertation argues that the future of a unified Korea has faded from its peak and that, at the time, the future prospects for unification are not hopeful as differences between the two Koreas have grown larger than the features once shared.

Considering the research questions and objectives introduced at the beginning of this dissertation, it can thus be concluded that the belief in a common identity that binds the two Koreas together no longer reigns the dynamics of nationalism within South Korea as the members of its society have greatly benefited from economic prosperity and interconnectivity with other nations which led them to develop an exclusive form of national identity characterized by its modern and cosmopolitan essence. The emergence of this South Korean identity has been growing over the years and, as younger generations grow up under this 'globalized' atmosphere, characterized by consumerism and multiculturalism, they are thus leaving behind the focus on inter-Korean relations and ethnic homogeneity as the nation's ethos. Consequently, as this new identity expands, the perceived distance from the North grows and develops into an obstacle towards unification as, as we have seen, the willingness to unify declines every year.

While the major findings of the present work align and verify what was previously discovered by more recent scholars, it has also contributed to the debate by demonstrating the various ways in which South Korea has been consolidating its definition of 'self', both nationally and internationally, predominantly by constructing its national identity in opposition

to the North. Essentially, the research has shown that, over the decades, national identity within the South has diverged from the rhetoric of Korean nationalism and constructed an understanding of ‘self’ that progressively moves away from the North as globalization movements exacerbate the differences felt between the two countries. The present dissertation remains relevant to the literature as it questions the relevance of the long-established dynamics of ethnic nationalism in modern South Korea and fundamentally argues that, as support for *danil minjok* declines, the willingness to unify equally deteriorates, ultimately leading to the rise of an exclusive South Korean national identity removed from the outdated narratives of shared ethnicity. In order to confirm these arguments, the present research benefited from the analysis of national surveys on the perception of unification combined with an investigation of the ongoing dimensions of ‘self’ within South Korean society, which mutually reinforced and corroborated each other and vice-versa.

Notwithstanding the contributions that the present work has provided to the literature on Korean nationalism, it is certain that this study could have benefited from interviews with South Koreans that would have undoubtedly reinforced the premises here defended, nonetheless, due to time constraints, such has not been possible. However, it is encouraged and suggested to future individuals interested in the topic to engage in a more in-depth research that questions South Koreans’ opinions on unification in the following years. As it is a topic that highly fluctuates considering the international panorama, it remains crucial to review if the trend of disassociation here defended still verifies or if South Koreans shifted to a more conservative approach to nationalism, as many countries have been doing in the last years.

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