

The promotion project on sociocultural exchange and communication between North and South Koreans

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Abstract: This paper aims to develop effective and efficient sociocultural exchanges and communication programs between North and South Koreans. To this end, data has been collected from domestic and foreign literature reviews and interviews. Based on the research results, this paper suggests developing several practical programs for promoting social exchanges and communication between North and South Koreans. In particular, this paper suggests the following: 1) adopting a bottom-up approach, 2) acknowledging the cultural differences between North and South Koreans and the diversity among the communicating subjects, 3) collaborating with the international community, and 4) implementing the program in phases. Ultimately, this study will contribute to achieving peaceful unification, and enhancing mutual understanding and cultural collectivity through sociocultural exchanges and communication between the two Koreas.

Keywords: North and South Koreans, communication, sociocultural exchange

1 Introduction

Korea has been divided for some 70 years. South Korea has continually endeavored to communicate socially and culturally with North Korea, as its overarching goal is to achieve national unification. Since the North and South Korean summit talks, which were held in 2000 and 2007 several types of exchange programs have been developed. Consequently, personal exchange programs between youth and women have increased; in addition, exchange programs in the fields of art, folklore, and academic field have also risen (Lee et al., 2000: p. 60). However, these exchange and communication programs are still limited due to political and ideological conflicts. In addition, most programs are one-off and are disconnected from other existing programs (Lee et al., 2000: Chon 2006: pp. 16-17). Choi (2006) argued that South

Korea's attitude of cultural superiority creates hindrances in communicating with North Koreans. Nevertheless, social and cultural exchange programs between the two Koreas are meaningful, and will play a role in overcoming cultural differences in the path to social integration and unification. For example, Germany accomplished unification and social integration by promoting active exchange and communication between the communities in East and West Germany (Park, 1999; Sin, 1999; Yang and Kim, 1991). Therefore, this study aims to explore the practical means of communication and exchange between the two Koreas with the ultimate goal of accomplishing peaceful unification.

2 Background

The legislation titled "the Act of Interchange and Cooperation Between South and North Korea" on social and cultural interchange and cooperation between the two Koreas was constructed in 1900. According to the inter-Korean basic agreement developed in 1993, the fields of social and cultural interchange have been classified into several categories including: education, literature, art, health care, journalism, and the media. In addition, the agreement refers to scientific and professional science and technology and environmental cooperation (Ministry of Unification, 2014).

The types of exchanges are divided into two groups: personal and material. The objectives of political and economic exchanges differ from social and cultural interactions for the following reasons: 1) while political exchanges aim at unity and economic exchanges aim at efficiency, social and cultural exchanges seek to embrace diversity. In other words, they seek to acknowledge and respect the different views, cultural norms, and values of both societies; 2) Political exchanges are in the fields of politics, economy, and the military. Economic exchanges are in the fields of the economy, scientific research, and the environment. On the other hand, social and cultural exchanges are in the fields of society, culture, art, education, and religion; 3) Political exchanges involve government agencies and economic exchanges engage the business sector. However, social and cultural exchanges involve civil society. It should also be noted that sociocultural exchanges are expanding to neighboring countries and include the involvement of the North and South Korean diaspora; the role of the diaspora is significant in this regard (Kim CH, Yu SE, Kim YY, 2013, pp.14, 27).

3 Method

The data collected from literatures has been analyzed for domestic and foreign examples of social and cultural exchange programs. Also, the ten cases of interview toward policymakers, governmental officers and activists working at NGOs or institutions have been implemented. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes, during which time interviewees discussed their experiences of meeting and communicating with North Koreans.

Based on the literature review and interviews, a strategic plan aiming to promoting

the sense of community was developed. The strategic plan was examined by two professionals: a researcher who has worked on issues pertaining to North Korea for over ten years, and a government officer with over thirty years of experiencing working on inter-Korean communication and cooperation programs.

4 Strategic plan: practical exchange programs between the two Koreas

4.1 Strategic plan

A. Bottom-up approach

Communication between North and South Koreans needs to begin at a micro level and be part of people's daily lives. Communication programs could include diverse areas such as culture, art, sports, and history. Beginning at a micro level will be more practical and efficient in terms of facilitating mutual understanding.

B. Acknowledging the cultural difference between the two Koreas

The gap between the two Koreas has increased. South Korea has experienced rapid industrialization and democratization since the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast, North Korea has faced growing economic deterioration, including food shortages; at the same time, it has become progressively isolated from the international community. This is very similar to Germany's history. Prior to unification, West Germany, who was economically stronger, actively strived to communicate with East Germany, however, East Germany's response was somewhat passive; as a result, the cultural gap between the two areas of Germany widened. Thus, we need to consider the cultural and economic gap that exists between the two Koreas in order to develop effective exchange and communication programs.

C. Diversity of communicating subjects

We need to consider the diversity of the people who are engaged in the exchange programs. Until now, the government has primarily implemented communication programs between North and South Koreans. Even though civil society has been involved in communication activities, the government plays a significant and influential role in inter-Korean communication. While the role of the government is considerable during the initial phases of implementation, in the long-term, it will be more effective and efficient if the diverse exchange programs were implemented by civil society. In order to achieve this, we need to build cooperative systems within civil society. Additionally, the Korean diaspora can play a significant role in terms of encouraging and initiating inter-Korean communication. In addition, members of the diaspora can freely contact both North and South Koreans and play a mediating role between the two Koreas. Consequently, it is important that we collaborate not only with the government, but also with diverse members of the civil society and the Korean diaspora.

D. Cooperation with the international community

Peaceful unification on the Korean Peninsula is in the interests of the two Koreas as well as neighboring countries. The latter can play a significant role in connecting the two Koreas by acting as a mediator. Thus, greater collaboration is required among neighboring countries, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

E. Implementation phases

Communication programs between the two Koreas need to be implemented in several stages. The programs should be implemented as follows: <Table 1>

Table 1. Implementation stages

	Preparatory stage	Meeting and contact stage	Communication stage
Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the notion of unification among South Koreans Promoting cultural exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding communication opportunities for both North and South Koreans Promoting trust-between North and South Koreans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving mutual understanding Promoting cooperation and diversity
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding opportunities for South Koreans to visit North Korea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting exchange programs and commerce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting exchange programs in various fields Regularizing and institutionalizing exchange programs Expanding the subjects and fields of exchange
Subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging the government Engaging civil society (including Koreans living abroad) Strengthening the capacity of local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborating with government, civil society, and private organizations Strengthening the role of local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging civil society, private organizations, and local government Obtaining support from the government
Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involving the Center for Unified Future of Korea Performing cultural events showcasing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the fields of culture, art, sports, academy, education, and religion Tree planting program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the fields of cultural art, sports, academy, education, and religion Social organizations exchange program

	Korean culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the fields of culture, art, sports, academy, education, and religion • Promoting tour programs to North Korea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art group exchange program • Sports group exchange program • Fieldtrips examining cultural and historical sites in North and the South Korea • Joint excavation program of North and South Korea's ruins • Cultural performance implemented by local government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct exchange of programs • Regular exchange program • Making contact with local governments and universities • Expanding personal exchange programs • Cohosting international contests and conferences • Hosting the Korean Wave Festival
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4. 2. Practical exchange programs for North and South Koreans

Exchange programs can be implemented in various fields, such as education, academy, culture, art, health, and sports. Specific ideas for programs include: <table 2>.

Table 2. Practical exchange programs

Programs	Main contents
Joint management of forests and rivers in the North and South	Researching and managing the ecological environment in the collaboration with both Koreas
Exchange visits of separated families with second and third generation	Implementing educational programs involving North and South youth in the exchange visits of separated families
The seventieth anniversary of the independence celebration	Holding conferences, film festivals, performances etc. to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the independence celebration
Joint excavation program of cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint excavation of historical ruins and intangible cultural assets • Hosting a joint academic workshop or conference
Mt.Kumgang, Gaeseong, and Mt.Baekdu tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resumption of Mt.Kumgang tour • Mt.Baekdu tour via North Korea • Gaeseong tour: primary, middle, and high school students' fieldtrip program
Maternal and child health care program for women	Meetings between North and South Korean women
Cooperating in the protection of the Korean peninsula	Movement to protect Dokdo Island, reporting issues related to comfort women etc.
Joint participation in international contests	Participating in international games or contests as a unified team

Festival titled "Unification Culture week"	Holding cultural events related to unification, such as performances, exhibitions, film festivals, academic forums or conferences, joint youth contest etc.
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5 Discussion

The South Korean government has sought peaceful unification, and has carried out policies of unification on the principle of freedom and democracy. However, practical and concrete steps aiming to prepare the two Koreas for unification are still lacking. National unification can be accomplished based on the recovery of cultural homogeneity between North and South Koreans, and the promotion of mutual understanding through exchange programs. This paper shows the practical and strategic plans for exchange and communication between the two Koreas.

Fundamentally, we need to strengthen the community's competence for unification. The competences can be categorized as follows: 1) cultural competence: the ability to acknowledge and respect cultural differences and diversity; 2) social competence: the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully; 3) civil competence: the ability to recognize a high sense of citizenship that entails trust, tolerance, and kindness. By improving these competences, we will achieve social integration and peaceful unification; the implementation of exchange and communication programs will play a significant role in this regard.

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