

ILC2021 UPF Europe and the Middle East: Session VI - History and Culture

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Europe and the Middle East - The sixth session of the August 2021 International Leadership Conference asked if the Korean people's common history and culture can overcome the division on the Korean Peninsula.

From August 19 to 21, seven sessions of the ILC were held online under the title "Toward Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Prospects for Economic Development and Peace, and Ideologies, Worldviews, and International Relations."

The August 21 session, titled "The Korean People's Common History and Culture: Resources for Peace on the Korean Peninsula," was organized jointly by UPF and its International Association of Academicians for Peace (IAAP) and International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP).

A total of 137 participants attended the Zoom broadcast, with 581 watching the livestream on the UPF Europe Facebook page and an additional 117 viewers on Russian networks.

The Korean people share a long history and a deeply rooted mythology, which have played an important role in shaping an enduring Korean identity. In 1919, the March 1 Independence Movement against Japanese colonial rule was a founding milestone for modern Korea. After World War II, however, the political division imposed on Korea eventually settled into a confrontation of radically opposed ideologies. The panelists of Session VI examined whether the Korean people's common history and culture can help forge a vision that transcends the ideological conflict inherited from the Cold War and thus overcome the division on the Peninsula.



In her introduction, moderator Chantal Chételat Komagata, the UPF coordinator for Europe, explained why UPF is organizing numerous discussions worldwide about peace on the Korean Peninsula. The UPF founders, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, both were born in what is today North Korea and were refugees in their own country. They witnessed the division of their country due to opposing ideologies, a situation that continues to this day, whereas most countries divided for the same reason have been reunited.



Professor Yoshisumi Asai, a researcher at the Faculty of Global and Regional Studies at Doshisha University in Japan, gave a deep insight into Kim Il Sung's Juche ideology and the North Korean regime. The ideology emerged in the 1960s for North Korea to establish a communist system of its own in the midst of confrontation between China and the Soviet Union. As a human-centered, atheist philosophy, it says that human beings have both a physical life limited in time, and a socio-political life, which can perpetuate thanks to organizational and ideological cohesion with the nation's leader, Kim Il Sung. There are three attributes to the socio-political life: creativity, consciousness and, above all, autonomy.

Professor Asai mentioned that the philosophy bears some similarities with the Christian salvation theory. While Christians believe that salvation comes only by following Jesus Christ, political eternal life cannot be obtained by individual effort alone, but only by becoming one ideologically with the Great Leader.



Professor Asai said that Kim Il Sung is believed to have been born and raised in a Christian family. While communism denies the existence of God and opposes religion, the Juche ideology is somehow a re-creation of communism with a touch of the Christian salvation theory, and Jesus Christ replaced by Kim Il Sung. North Korea is compared to a trinity of Kim Il Sung, who is like the brain; the Workers' Party of Korea, comparable to the nervous system; and the people, who are like the cells under its command.

Those who are loyal to Kim Il Sung and part of the trinity gain eternal political life, and a nation supported by such people will not perish. Rather than through the use of force, the regime based on the Juche ideology is maintained mainly through the "education" of the people, which begins as early as kindergarten.

Dr. Alon Levkowitz, a professor in the Department of Asian and Korean Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, spoke about the political and economic challenges that the two Koreas face. The economic gap between both is huge. How much should be invested to upgrade the Korean economy and over what period of time? The cost is estimated at US \$10 trillion. South Korea is in favor of incremental development, to prevent the North Korean regime or economy from shaking.

Moreover, in South Korea the main challenge is the falling birth rates. Cooperation with North Korea, which has seen a slight growth in the birth rate since 2000, would solve this problem in the South, Dr. Levkowitz said. Furthermore, most natural resources are found in North Korea. If the two Koreas unified or cooperated, these natural resources would be used to the benefit of both sides.

In the short run, unification would be very expensive. In the long run, however, it would be a win-win situation. Politicians tend to think of their short-term legacy and do not pursue a policy that will influence the future. The older generation in the population tends to support unification, while the younger is more skeptical. Koreans have shown great resilience in the past, which is hopeful for the future.

Next to the economic challenge, there is also a political price to pay. In a unified Korea, one leader would have to step down in favor of the other, which means that the coexistence of two states that try to improve the economic, political, and cultural cooperation might be a better choice. At the same time, it would prevent a military escalation between the two countries.

Dr. Levkowitz concluded by saying that politics and reality do not always work together. For instance, contrary to expectations, unemployment in South Korea is on the increase, despite the falling birth rate. And in the long run, the educational system, the army, industry, and the pension system will be affected.



Dr. Thomas Selover, the president of SunHak Universal Peace Graduate University in South Korea, spoke about Headwing thought in relation to Korean culture and the Korean Peninsula, and its three principles: interdependence, mutual prosperity, and universal values. He quoted Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, who said that she and her late husband, having experienced the destructive nature of communism, had committed themselves to preventing it from spreading to other parts of the world. They also realized that the so-called free world was suffering moral and spiritual decline, and that the foundations of faith, family, and freedom in liberal democratic societies were not healthy. Therefore, her husband, Dr. Sun Myung Moon, coined the term "Headwing" to balance left-wing and right-wing ideologies. Based on Headwing thought, they have been working to create a world based on interdependence, mutual prosperity, and universally shared values.

Dr. Selover explained the concept of interdependence as inspired by, among others, the interdependent synergy seen in nature, human relations, and economic cooperation. Economic or political mutual prosperity means not only the benefit of two persons, the so-called win-win solution, but also includes the benefit of the whole, which can be called win-win-win solutions.

Secondly, mutual prosperity is based on the parental type of love and purpose-centered relationships as an extension of the family model, society, nation, and world, which leads to mutual respect, good governance, and harmony on all levels of society. Mutual prosperity, modeled on brotherly attitudes, is deeply connected to Confucianism, which traditionally, for instance, has expressed political relations in terms of familial relations. This can help break through political impasses. The Buddhist tradition also teaches how to overcome self-centered motivations and actions.

Finally, universal values, the third Headwing principle, implies the recognition that each person's conscience, also called the original mind, is the basis of human righteousness, human rights, and mutual respect. Generally speaking, religious traditions have been the primary carriers of universal values.

Dr. Selover spoke about the visit that Rev. and Mrs. Moon paid to Kim Il Sung in 1991, in the spirit of Headwing thought and on the foundation of tremendous work in civil society, building linkages of interdependence in Korea and throughout the world.



Professor Thomas Hwang, the chair of the Chinese People's Federation for World Peace International, said that after World War II, Korea was divided beyond the will of the people. In the following decade the struggle between democracy and communism widened the gap between North and South Korea. The situation in Korea is a microcosm of the dilemma facing the world: the conflict between North and South, East and West, rich and poor, and a conflict of ideologies.

There is a saying in Chinese and Korean: "The one who tied the knot has to untie it." Given the fact that China is partly responsible for the partition of Korea, it is of paramount importance that China lends its support to the unification process of the two Koreas. As China's power and influence in the world have grown, we need to focus on its relationship with North and South Korea, Professor Hwang said.

China's main concern is South Korea's military alliance with the United States. If South Korea and China could reach a military security agreement, there would be no more need for US troops in South Korea.

Professor Hwang expressed his belief that the solution would be for Korea to declare itself a neutral nation, such as Switzerland. Great wisdom and diplomatic skills are needed to find a way to gain China's cooperation and Korean unification, he argued. It is in the interest of China, and indeed many countries in the region, to have peace on the Korean Peninsula. At the same time, Japan, Russia, and the United States should participate to come to a balanced agreement. In this context, he said, the International Peace Zone that the UPF founders envisaged as a meeting point in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) would be the perfect location for the United Nations' Asian headquarters.

Mélanie Komagata, an intern at UPF Europe and the Middle East and a postgraduate student in East Asian studies at the University of Geneva, conducted the question-and-answer session.

Asked which values can reconcile the contradictory viewpoints of socialist regimes - which emphasize the state and common welfare - and those of democratic regimes - which prioritize personal freedom and rights - Dr. Selover said that, most importantly, we should recognize that there are universal values, because we are all part of the same interdependent order.

Belief in the cross-cultural, cross-political, and cross-historical commonality of humanity is the starting

point for overcoming differences in perceptions of political arrangements, Dr. Selover said. Universal values should be recognized and found in any given interaction. One should be aware that freedom and equality, or freedom and responsibility, are intimately connected with each other.

Following the recent events in Afghanistan, and the fact that opinions are very divergent, a question was asked about the strength of the alliance between South Korea and the United States. Dr. Selover answered that the situation in Korea is quite different from Afghanistan. Next to geopolitical strategies and day-to-day politics, connections and common values exist between Koreans and Americans that go back generations.



To the question of what the North Korean paintings may awaken in people's minds as they feature Kim Il Sung and his son smiling and hinting at something, Dr. Levkowitz noted that this type of painting is used in other countries as a way to show hope for a bright future.

In answer to which trust-building measures are being taken as a step toward peace, Professor Asai said that the United States, China, Japan, and Russia are involved in the Korean unification process. Therefore, both North and South Korea should make relationships with each of those countries. Also, the United Nations should be involved, so that the unification of Korea is not overly centered on China. Even though the North Koreans already have the Juche ideology, we should establish a system to educate them about the Headwing ideology.

Dr. Levkowitz and Dr. Selover both added that to bypass the problem of mistrust among governments and politicians, room must be given to international NGOs and culture, which can build trust and human networks among the people. K-pop or K-dramas, portraying the depth of human feelings, have created a community of fans all over the world and built a foundation to then speak on other issues. Furthermore, the modern Korean culture has brought together people of countries in conflict, notably in the Middle East.

Five recommendations were noted from this sixth session:

1. The division on the Korean Peninsula cannot be solved by politics without the grassroots support of the people.
2. NGOs and culture, which show deeper feelings, should build human networks and bridges among people, as people trust civil society more than governments.
3. European-based NGOs can achieve more in North Korea than US-based NGOs.
4. Korean unification cannot be achieved by North and South Korea only. China must help to unknot the tie it has made. Given the ideological divide, Japan, Russia, and the United States cannot be left out of the unification process.
5. Common values must be shared by all parties involved in the unification process.