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**Modernity and the Making of a New Polity:
Some Observations from Korean Unification
and European Integration**

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Modernity and the making of a new polity: some observations from Korean unification and European integration^{*†}

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Introduction: the varieties of modernity

Korean unification and European integration, two major political projects of our time, can be fruitfully interpreted by means of the concept of modernity. “modernity refers to a situation in which human beings do not accept any external guarantors, i.e. its guarantors that they do not themselves posit, of the certainty of their knowledge, of the viability of their political orders or of the continuity of their selves.” This theoretical view, as suggested by Wagner (2001b: 4), will guide me to interpret these political projects in attempting to answer the question of how meanings of politics are newly created by political actors themselves. The precise interpretation of modernity is inescapably shaped by the perspective of particular political actors under the shadow of their socio-political burdens. In extension of this assumption, I argue that the meanings of modernity are also

^{*}This paper draws on my doctoral thesis. See Shin (2002)

[†]In order to minimize the bibliographical confusion, some Korean authors are quoted with their full names.

historically located in the sense that particular actors orient their political projects always towards solving their contemporary *problématique*.

At first sight, it seems as if the unification of the two Korean states, South Korea and North Korea or, as they are officially named, the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of Korea, would need to be understood simply as a national project of the kind that has been exhaustively investigated in the social sciences. The study of Korean unification, in such a light, would hold little attraction for anyone who describes the current period as the post-national era, based on the idea of the globalization of politics and the economy, on the one hand, and on the popular discourse about economic and political and even cultural regional, i. e. supranational, integration, on the other. In contrast to such a view, it is argued here that a review of the Korean political project is needed especially today when the de-nationalization of political agendas is clearly observable in other parts of the world. Furthermore, the claim is made that a fruitful comparative evaluation of the Korean project and the regional integration process in Europe can be made in terms of possibly common characteristics of two different political projects in 'our time'.¹ Certain views on European integration can be meaningfully related to Korean unification. Of particular importance in this respect are the European answers to the question why the building of a regional structure beyond national level is seen as necessary in Europe at the beginning of the third millennium.

In the following, the first section will be devoted to the discourse on Korean unification of which some issues will be discussed and evaluated: firstly, the opposition of retrospective, nostalgic views and future-oriented ones on Korean unity; secondly, the role of unification in the debate on the state-centeredness of (South?) Korean politics and the underdevelopment of democracy; thirdly, the tension between international and regional politics, on the one hand, and Korean politics, on the other. South Korean politics will be described as an

¹The collective terminology, 'we' and its extensive forms could be always contestable. I just use the term not as given and objective one, but as a desirable one.

example of a constraining polity configuration that needs new political dynamics, and it will be argued that the unification process under peaceful conditions could contribute to developing such dynamics.² The second section will focus on two dilemmas in European integration, both related to the question of the existence of a European region and civilization. While the unification discourse in Korean studies, firstly, is marked by a dual and ambivalent view of the power of national identity, as highly enabling but also aggressive; a similar duality is involved in the critique of the idea of 'European civilization'. European civilization may contribute to peace in that region, but the (re-) assertion of European unity may create negative side-effects from which other parts of the world may suffer. Secondly, the policy discourse on European regional integration, as strong as it may be, remains disputed and to some extent undermined by a deeply engrained national or even nationalist orientation that never entirely disappeared.

This discussion brings the reasoning back to modernity and, in particular, to the discourse on multiple modernities - or, the varieties of modernity. This discourse has raised an important conceptual question: in which sense is modernity plural, and in the face of that plurality, what are the elements that allow the combination of its varieties under the singular term 'modernity'.³ Some scholars seek the answer to this question in the relation between cultural diversity, on the one hand, and universalized institutional mechanisms, on the other. I intend here to find the answer in the comparison between Korean unification and European integration: 'The key characteristics of modernity [is] that human beings think of themselves as setting their own rules and laws' (Wagner, 2001b), while they are situated in different spaces and orient themselves to different solutions in the context of their own world views.

²It would be useful to compare my methodological concerns here to those of some works in the discourse of European integration, in terms of how current political agendas of boundary politics are historically evaluated in a critical way of reviewing the past of nation-states and the region. See, for example, Ferry (2000).

³See Arnason (2000a, 2000b, 1998); Eisenstadt (2000b); Wagner (2001a ,2000b); Wittrock (2000, 1998).

1 The (re)unification of Korea: the national project in the “post-national” era

Introduction

The collapse of the Berlin wall accelerated the demise of the Cold War configuration of international politics. Eventually, the (re)unification of Germany was realized and the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe became powerless and inclined to Western Europe. In North-East Asia, Russia and China, who had been friendly to North Korea for strategic reasons since 1945, began to initiate diplomatic relations with South Korea, which had shown both impressive economic growth and political transformation towards democratization, in 1990 and 1992. Other former-socialist countries in Europe also began to forge links with South Korea for economic reasons. The two Korean states, in this changed atmosphere, joined the United Nations and produced a statement promoting reconciliation between them in 1991 after several meetings. However, the peace process ended without further accomplishments in the 1990s: the expected summit meeting between the leaders of the two Korean states, aimed at thawing political and military hostility, was thwarted by the death of the North Korean leader, Kim Il-Sung in 1994 and the rigid political situation in South Korea where his death was treated as critical for the maintenance of the stubborn North Korean attitude. Finally, two heads of state, KIM Dae-Jung and KIM Jung-Il met and began to open a wider dialogue on 15 June, 2000. Since this symbolic event, the two Korean states have gradually changed their frozen attitude to one another.

No one doubts that any inter-state relationship between South and North Korea is mapped on the road to the reunification of the Korean nation. It is not simply because both states could not avoid the unification agenda from the state activities for their people. Rather it determines the legitimacy of the states, so the states should actively include the reunification issue for their domestic politics. The emergence of two Korean states in the

1940s was followed by the war between the two states supported by the pan-American bloc, on the one hand, and the Soviet bloc, on the other. The occurrence of the Korean war and committed crimes against the other part have been justified by major political actors in the name of achieving the reunification of Korea and establishing a new nation state as successor to the Korean empire, which had been collapsed by Japan in 1910. The maintenance of a two-state system in Korea since the second half of the twentieth century, with the capitalist model adopted by one side and the socialist model by the other, could be understood as the rise of the so-called modern state at the expense of the fragmentation of the national polity into two states.

Also, in order to correctly evaluate South Korean politics, it is necessary to draw attention to the obstacles for the democratization of South Korea, deeply connected with the division of the states. In other words, South Korean politics is highly dependent on the agenda of the inter-state relationship with the North Korean state. This is particularly true with regard to the current political situation since the 1990s - which can be understood as a transitional period toward the customization of democracy for peoples' everyday lives - which might be shaken again by the rise of an authoritarian state under the impact of a possible clash between the two states. Interestingly, this vulnerability of South Korean politics has been highly focused in Korean studies and some scholars raise diverse theoretical views on the particular historical setting of the Korean polity and alternatives.

1.1 The reunification discourse

1.1.1 Korea as a community: Nostalgia for the lost community and the role of romanticism in the unification movement

The communication channel between the South and the North had been exclusively set at the state level. The South Korean state, under rigid anti-communist ideology, controlled the unification discourse, following a bold agenda in domestic politics. The state regarded

many democratic movement groups as supporters of North Korean policies towards the South and so suppressed their democratic claims with national security laws. After the victory of democratic movements in 1987, however, the students' association for democratic change more extensively raised the issue of the reunification of Korea. The extension of the public sphere that incorporated political voices from many more social classes, enabled the students to organize the 'unification movement', demanding open communication with North Korea.⁴

Interestingly, the unification movement was based on a romantic approach that has become eroded by an institutional approach since the reunification of Germany in 1991.⁵ In order to identify the rather narrow direction of the students' association unification movement, it is necessary to examine the actual boundary of politics in the 1980s. Firstly, the political relationship between the two states had ossified around the Olympic Games in 1988: South Korea was lauded by the international community - including socialist states - for its economic growth, while North Korea faced accusations of terrorism following the explosion of a South Korean airplane. Secondly, active political groups intended to tackle the legitimacy of the state with reference to its unification policy, in which they criticized the national security law, and the inactive response to reunification by the state. Thirdly, a wide spectrum of political orientations for democracy was becoming apparent by the late 1980s: from conservative reformist to radical anti-state actors. The romantic approach of the unification movement reemerged in this political context.

The movement began neither with an institutional preparation for reconciliation nor with an interest-based proposition for economic prosperity after reunification. Rather, it

⁴The participation of a student in the international youth and student festival held in Pyongyang, North Korea in 1989 ignited public debate. First of all, she ignored the law that prohibited any private contact with North Koreans. Secondly, her itinerary was symbolic: Seoul-Berlin-Pyongyang- (the military division site in the de-militarized zone between the South and North) -Seoul. She was immediately sent to prison when she crossed the South Korean border.

⁵In this paper, I narrowly use the term, 'romantic approach', only to indicate the certain rhetoric on the Korean nation as 'Family' whose members share many experiences in their lives and are assumed to have common identities.

was designed to remind the state of an urgent 'humanitarian issue'; that there were a number of divided families in the South and North who had not met their family members since the Korean war and even since the division of Korea in 1945. The long duration of divided families and their pains and *hans*⁶, a cultural concept, at the present time provokes endlessly the desire for reunification of the nation (Jager, 1996). Furthermore, the unification movement was to some extent itself the reflection on modern Korean history as a whole - negatively framed - readdressing the question of who should be responsible for the current division of Korea. Needless to say, supporters of the students' movement for reunification were more serious critics of the US and Japan than others.⁷

The assumption underpinning the romantic approach of the students' movement was that many Koreans, or Koreans as a whole, wished to restore a durable single nation-state. More specially, this argued a return to the past, rather than a new orientation for the future. It could also mean that the past should become the future, and the future should

⁶Since the 1970s, more or less, Korean studies has discovered a cultural concept, *han*. In the face of many Koreans who suffer from adverse socio-political or personal conditions, theologians and psychologists in particular have identified that Koreans conclusively explain their psychological condition by means of the concept *han*. Personal and familial problems, even collective problems, are narrated by *han*, especially when the causes of these problems arise from outside of the individual. These scholars have found that *han* functions for Koreans not only as an interpretative method for the relationship between the external world and themselves, but also as a self-diagnostic tool for the identification of one's current psychological status as resulting from the unfair consequences of the world. The concept, *han*, has been translated in various ways: 'bitterness and anger', 'unfulfilled' wish, 'unrequited resentments', 'long accumulated sorrow and regret over one's misfortune', and so forth. When its several aspects are investigated in social context, *han* has been regarded as something different from 'resentment' and 'melancholy', in that it cannot directly trigger one's anger towards its causes, and also because it contains powerful energy towards the external world. The concept *hanpuli* means literally releasing *han*. Defining *hanpuli* is, however, likewise difficult, not only because it is related to the understanding of *han*, but also because there are many ambivalent ways of releasing *han*. In the Korean context, the ways of *hanpuli* include dance, music in shamanist symbolic ritualism, and direct revengeful actions. Many novelists, poets, and film directors, as well as academics, still debate the question of the most appropriate form of *hanpuli*. Sublimation in spirit, rather than revenge or vengeful actions, is argued as the better way of dissolving *han*. The collective forms of *hanpuli* in the public sphere, however, are mainly presented in collective practice, for example, workers movements, anti-state movements, and regionalist politics. *Hanpuli* is even illustrated as a driving force for economic activities underpinning fast industrialization and economic growth. Thus, *han* and *hanpuli* are regarded as crucial for understanding the particularity of Korean society. See, for example, CHOI Kil-Sung (1989); CHOI Sang-Jin (1993, 1991); KIM Choong Soon (1992); LEE Hee-Kyung (1996, 1995).

⁷The post-liberation period and the Korean War have become popular subjects for artistic genres. A number of novels, poems in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, reintroduced individuals' experiences which could not be entirely dissolved in collective ones. Anger, sorrow, pain, inability to forget - culturally better understood as *han* - are described through historical events.

be made in the image of the past. The present situation does not generate criticism in itself. Rather, the source of the critical view of the present is what was already there and what is not available for the moment. At the same time and for that reason, the future is not simply suggested. Its path is strongly determined already by new problems in the present which did not exist in the past. Even though the past is certainly not symbolized as a prosperous time with abundant material resources for economic consumption, nor with the pride of being a dominant political power in regional politics, it is praised as a happy time for social and cultural life in the family and the community. At the individual level, divided Korea is ultimately symbolized as an essential source of pain, which never disappears, and which has lasted for several generations.

The unification movement in the late 1980s and the early 1990s was partly successful and partly failed. It was successful because the issue of unification and the relationship between the South and North began to be more considerably dealt with in state policies, on the one hand, and the peoples could make representations based on their own experiences at the individual level, which had been impossible in the period of state-centered modernization, on the other. It is important to remember that the reunification discourse was reintroduced in the public sphere in the period of socio-economic transformation. It was a well-timed intervention of the romantic approach, when interest-based negotiation in the economic sphere began to emerge, and when the democratization of domestic politics was signaled. The triangular configuration of nation, people and democracy was the irreducible core for understanding political and economic disputes. Thus, the 'reunification' agenda shaped the particularity of Korean politics, even spilling over to other social issues, but always emphasizing the national aspect.

The romantic approach of the unification movement partly failed, however, in that it only problematized the current situation from the view-point of a grand perspective of the future. It could not clearly show how to arrive at a reunified Korea, except by criticizing the USA and the South Korean state. Even though it was critical, particularly

of the South Korean state's lack of endeavor, this was not further developed to the level of a national discourse on political and economic reunification. One could defend the unification movement under the romantic approach against the charge that its limits can be found in its subjective character: firstly, the political actors; the students' association, active artists, and other social movements and secondly, the way of approaching the unification issue through individual and collective *han*. Rather, one would argue that the situational prematurity of the late 1980s and early 1990s is exposed, in terms of developing a unification discourse as a preparation for policies for reunification. The romantic approach of counter-state political actors was suddenly replaced by policy discourse at the state level, without a gradual linkage between the former and the latter. The discursive shift, by and large, came from the influence of the reunification of Germany.

1.1.2 Korea as a polity: the development of the policy discourses of reunification and the lessons from the German experience of reunification

While the political movement for reunification was dominated by romanticism, the social sciences - mainly in South Korea - extended their knowledge of the impact of division on the political situation in South Korea. The competition of the two Korean states for political legitimation (LEE ManWoo, 1993) and economic development, led to the restriction of political freedom and enforced a restrictive social life on individuals. The system of division was identified as the obstacle to democratization and even as the very source of major socio-political contradictions (PAIK Nak-chung, 1999, 1993). Many political scientists focused on the nature of the authoritarian state in terms of how it manipulated the political legitimacy of the state. The overall conclusion generally indicates that the state and several regimes have justified their political violence and illegitimate dominance of the state with anti-communist and anti-North Korean ideology. The confrontation and an unstable regional political situation have been used as resources for manipulating the crisis of the state and peoples' individual and social lives. The restriction of political activities

in the political and economic spheres, suggested and sustained by the state and a conservative network, was justified by them as the inescapable self-limitation of democratic desires under the particular circumstances of South Korea. At the same time, a number of social scientists investigated the problematic contribution of North Korea to class movements. Just as much as the South Korean state's manipulation of North Korea's ready-made aggression for resuming war, the North Korean policies in response to the domestic politics of the South were criticized by some researchers of workers movements and by more theoretical analysts of the *Juche* system. The Marxian perspectives, which experienced a resurgence in the academic world from the 1980s, began to produce criticism of North Korean ideology: the replacement of the law of societal development in history by the 'humanist' perspective; the overloaded idea of the nation as de-emphasizing class conflict; the lack of conceptual space for the activities of the trade-unions and developing workers' movements; the underdeveloped and ill-fitting methodological tools for investigating the social formation of South Korea, and so on. Thus, not only the South Korean, but also the North Korean state, were subjected to critical attack. In fact, however, the intellectual development of a dual criticism is a diagnosis of problems, rather than a concrete proposal for reunification.

Both the South and the North had been proposing reunification programmes to each other since 1972. However, the procedural problems, understood by them both as the most delicate and important agenda - South Korea demanded social and economic integration, while North Korea emphasized in political and military issues - meant that state level reunification programmes never got off the ground (KIM Hong Nack, 1992; Suh, 1992). The reunification discourse since the 1990s in the South, has significantly dealt with the programmes of economic and political integration between the two states in an asymmetric manner. The changed international atmosphere - the collapse of the former Soviet bloc and the considerable success of South Korea's *nordpolitik* - and the widening economic gap between North and South Korea gave more weight to South Korea's role, not only from

a Southern perspective, but also from an international one, and according to the German model of reunification (Eberstadt and Banister, 1992; Lin, 1992; Paus, 1998). Anticipating the collapse of North Korea in an economic crisis, policy scientists and state-sponsored institutions began to estimate the financial cost of reunification.

German reunification, perhaps unsurprisingly, became the most valuable example for Korean policy makers. Analysis of the German experience, however, proved less than fruitful for the Korean context. The most important conclusion of policy scientists was that South Korea did not have the economic capacity to proceed the German way (Johnson, 1993; Rhee, 1993; Schmidt, 1993; Shim, 1993). More seriously, it was expected that the sudden collapse of North Korea would be deleterious to the South Korean economy (KIM Dae-Jung, 1993).⁸ Thus, the analysis of the option for reunification by means of the absorption of North Korea into South Korea laid bare how unrealistic this was.

It has been pointed out that most policy scientists totally ignore the North Korean interest in reunification. They simply treat North Korea as the object of South Korean policy, rather than as one of the two subjects of reunification. Let us counter-factually imagine that South Korea has sufficient economic capacity for managing the costs of unification, say as much as West Germany had. Could the German model still be recommended for South Korea or both Koreas? Is it a viable option to just let the North Korean state collapse? Or is it appropriate to enforce an economic transformation towards neo-liberal capitalism on North Korea, as the condition for economic aid? Social scientists tend to critically respond to these questions in three ways: firstly, in the critique of West German politicians, as well as their South Korean counterparts; secondly, a critical appraisal of the

⁸The debate between economists and policy scientists on the economic view of the reunification of Korea, developed in four ways, by and large: firstly, the measurement of the actual cost of reunification in Germany - whether or not reunification expenses should cover the investment in the Eastern region and the allocation of welfare services (Noland et al., 1998); secondly, the short term and the long term effects of reunification on the South Korean economy (Rhee, 1993; Noland et al., 1998); thirdly, the cost comparison between the immediate integration and the gradual one of the two economies in the South and the North (Eberstadt, 1997); fourthly, finding adequate means of transition for the North Korean economy (Shim, 1993; Barna, 1998).

German model in terms of its lack of democratic public discourse and consequent problems; thirdly, the identification of 'progressive ethnic forces' in the Korean context.

East Germany did not collapse simply because of internal problems:

Rather, West German leaders, in an attempt to ensure the dominance of existing West German political and economic institutions in a unified Germany, deliberately pursued policies designed to speed the breakdown of the East German system. ... West Germany aggressively pursued the collapse and absorption of the East and the resulting unification has not served the interests of the great majority of Germans (Hart-Landsberg, 1995: 59).

Further, he argues that the absorption of North Korea would be a disaster, not only for North Koreans, but also for South Koreans. He critically investigates the extent to which the South Korean state has pursued the isolation of the North to facilitate its collapse, comparing and contrasting West German policies refusing the legitimacy of East Germany in international relations in the 1960s and *Ostpolitik* since the 1970s, with South Korea's rigid alliance with Japan and the USA. Hart-Landsberg asserts that the South Korean government has learnt an important lesson from Germany; that gradual unification by absorption is impossible (p.73). Accordingly, in order to maintain the current political and economic institutions and their relations, "it hopes that economic need will eventually force the North to accept social cultural exchanges thereby leading to the rapid collapse and absorption of North Korea" (p.74). Finally, he concludes that unification by absorption is undesirable for the creation of a democratic and independent Korea.

Habermas points to a serious problem in the German experience: 'Because there was *no public discussion of what citizens of the two states should expect of each other*, a certain discontent is now building up in the West, while feeling of resentment are spreading in the East' (Habermas, 1996: 12) (italics added). An increased dissatisfaction of Western taxpayers with redistribution to the East, mass unemployment in the East and the total

collapse of East German institutions - “from the economy, judicial system and state administration, through the regulation of traffic and health, to higher education, the media, the armed forces, and so on” (p.13) - are illustrated by Habermas as the mental side-effects of rapid unification. For him these negative experiences are important lessons for any possible Korean reunification.

PAIK Nak-Chung (1999, 1996) criticizes the Habermasian idea of separating a republican or democratic conception of the nation from an ethnic conception of the nation in the Korean context. “Not only does the ethnic conception still have a powerful role to play in a heteronomously divided nation of exceptionally high ethnic homogeneity, it can serve to raise theoretical and practical questions of possibly global significance beyond providing a warning against the pitfalls of ‘ethno-nationalism’” (1996: 19). He significantly emphasizes the vital role of the Korean diaspora - numbering some four million in the strategic countries of the US, China, Japan and Russia alone - as the multi-national ethnic community, for Korea’s democratic reunification. ‘What Koreans should envisage ... is a new federative structure suited to our particular historical experience. This naturally includes the experience of a population with at least ten centuries of political unity and, even now, an exceptionally high degree of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, *yet already with some proto-national divergences due to the length and severity of the division*’ (pp. 20-1) (italics added). His assertion on ethnic nationalism, reflects the view, widely-spread in the Korean intellectual world, for reunification. For him and many others, the nation-state in the Korean context should be regarded as a cultural community as well as a polity. The proposal of the compound state/community (PAIK Young-Seo, 1999; Park, 2000) and ‘the cultural community of the Korean nation’, including ethnic Koreans, arises not only from the practical awareness of the potential regional impacts of ethnic relations, but also from the theoretical challenge of ethnic nationalism in the social sciences, based on a historical understanding of the particularity of the Korean experience.

1.2 Rethinking international politics and Korean nationalism

The rigid system of division in Korea that has lasted since 1945 is now being undermined. The relationship between the two Korean states, which could only be described as 'hostile and antagonistic', is being gradually improved under a developing mutual recognition. The consequences of the historic meeting of the two leaders in June 2000 are being witnessed in the negotiation of political and security agendas as much as in economic and social ones. In spite of its significance compared with previous periods, the current situation is being interpreted as the beginning of a long road. In fact, it remains unclear whether the destination is the coexistence of two states in a harmonious environment, or the reunification of Korea. However, the general consensus is that round table talks to solve issues of joint concern ultimately signify the re-emergence of a unified Korea.

In addressing the interpretation of the reunification process, it is firstly necessary to clarify the particular aspect of the nation-state in Korean politics and its implications. If we become flexible to use the term, 'nation-state' over the modern form and its traditional counterpart, it is visible that Korea has had a relatively durable tradition of the nation-state, compared to national experiences in Europe, before colonization at the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides, this has been one of the major elements of Korean politics which informed Korean actors' particular ways of responding to new political situations under the global expansionism of imperial states. Besides, the main agenda of the Korean war was the accomplishment of the nation-state rather than of two separate states. As the state ideology of North Korea, the inescapable political agenda of the South Korean state and as the main motif of anti-state movements in South Korean democratic movements, the political agenda of making a unified country has distinctively shaped the political direction of modernity in Korea. Put more bluntly, a series of uneven political events related to foreign powers has been the motivational source for strong nationalistic voices for public agendas.

It has been widely pointed out by foreign scholars and even acknowledged by their Korean counterparts, that Korean studies has itself strong nationalistic perspectives, that should be investigated for any understanding of the reunification discourse. Let me introduce two distinctive arguments: firstly, that historically Korea not only never invaded other countries, but also never interfered in the domestic politics of neighboring countries, while it has very often been subjected to problematic neighbors' military attacks. Despite this, Korea secured its national sovereignty against foreign invasions, excepting colonization by Japan in the twentieth century. Secondly, in relation to these historical observations, nationalism in Korea is neither offensive nor expansive beyond its territory. Rather, it has been effectively represented as defending national sovereignty and national culture, even in the contemporary period.

The assumption that the Korean states never invaded other countries could be criticized as erroneous. There was expansion in the ancient period, at least when Goguryo enlarged its territory in west Manchu and the inner-Mongol region and territorial enlargement by Koryo and Chosun also. Many Koreans, however, would understand these military expansions as 'restoration' of old territories which had been lost under previous states. Whatever the truth, and however historical facts are interpreted, the genuine claim underpinning this issue is that Koreans in history have been less aggressive than other peoples in the Chinese area, Japan and the Western countries, who have intervened in Korean politics since the nineteenth century. In fact, when one tries to historically evaluate the strong assumption of the non- aggressive characteristics of the Korean, s/he would at least indirectly face the comparison between what Korea did and what other countries did. Why did the Korean states not undertake military expansionism while their neighbors did? Many adduce Korea's weakness compared to others. However, some Koreans do not hesitate to say that it is because Koreans are peaceful people, and that Neo-Confucian state ideology is not capable of producing an expansionist logic.

This is not a simple debate merely concerning the past. Anticipation of the new regional

situation in far East Asia after the reunification of Korea in the not-too-distant future, necessarily involves other regional powers and for the leaders of the Korean state, it demands the strategic preparation of securities and national interest (Blodgett, 1992). Hardly any regional power amongst China, Japan, Russia, the US expects a militarized Korea. There are, however, a couple of worrisome rumors regarding the new strategic situation.⁹ While a realist view takes Korea's non-aggression as a relative weakness, an optimistic view would be derived from Korea's relatively trouble-free regional politics before the twentieth century (Macdonald, 1992) and from the similarities with a divided Germany, now reunified. Habermas explains that even though "the unification of Germany could sometimes be perceived by its neighbors as a danger to the precarious balance within the European Union", a unified Germany has regulated its own ambition for political supremacy within Europe, in order to facilitate its political and economic integration within the European Union. Further, he argues that "a unification of Korea would not necessarily be felt by its neighbors as a disturbing factor", because "foreign policy becomes more directly based upon economics", and international cooperation in the Pacific area would be strengthened (Habermas, 1996: 8).

The need for reunification as argued by intellectuals, includes a unified Korea's ultimate contribution to regional political stability. While a divided Korea distorts to a great extent democratic political activities in the two states (PAIK Nak-chung, 1993), military confrontation between them, that also involves other countries, has cast their relationship in aspic. However, to agree a way of proceeding with the reunification process is to immediately depressurize the military crisis and to engender mutual recognition of all the regional countries and the US, all of which is crucial for the economic prosperity of the region. If both Korean states were to renounce any plans to become strong military pow-

⁹The most complicated issue concerns the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea. According to the International Herald Tribune (16, October, 2000), the US and Japanese worry about the possible reemergence of Chinese power in the Korean peninsula after US government's withdrawal. However, the Korean and Chinese are also afraid of Japanese rearmament and a resurgence of Japanese militarism. Accordingly, retaining US troops is persuasive for Korea and China for the time being.

ers, capable of challenging the regional neighbors' sovereignties, and if they transparently restructured their armies for the reunification process, reducing personnel to the numbers appropriate purely for defense, then the neighboring countries would be more supportive of the reunification process.

Putting aside external points of view, let us reconsider the implications of the claim of a national pride in loving peace and having a non-aggressive nature for Koreans themselves: the self-interpretation of their own historical becoming. I will highlight here two aspects of this self-understanding that are contradictory: a highly plausible contribution to the settlement of peace in East Asia under a utilitarian perspective, on the one hand, and at a deeper level, a critical and discriminative understanding of other countries' aggressiveness which must be introduced in comparison, on the other. Let us imagine a possible situation in which the claim of a historical tradition of peace-loving and non-expansionism would be introduced for a unified Korea's possible forswearing of territorial enlargement and military ambition. Is it problematic, even as a 'white lie' in an ultimate claim for truth? If it means that the political tradition is utilized in domestic political discourse for self-restraining those whose ambitions would aim for a rollback against problematic neighbor countries and the US; is it not efficient? Or, if regional powers could praise the Korean tradition and widely encourage its continuation in the twenty-first century, leading to a peaceful coexistence between them, is this not a considerable 'political option' for neighboring states? The ambivalence between effectiveness in politics and the truth of historical evaluation deserves consideration.

The Koreans' self-praise as non-offensive and peace-loving, however, not as 'one of many' in horizontal equality, but as 'better than others' in a vertical ordering, must be critically appraised. For, in fact, the self-evaluation of moral superiority over others, always devalues the others' moral status. The Korean claim, which should be evaluated through historical research, would be essentially a comparative claim of morality. The moral comparison of aggressiveness for those involved in Korean politics and the politics

of the region, is provocative for philosophers and social scientists, in that it unveils two different understandings of collective identity and a holistic view of the characteristics of a people in a country.

Most of all, this warns us of the epistemological gap between several disciplines in the social sciences and philosophy. Whereas in many philosophical works the individual has been presupposed as the epistemological and ontological unit, for international politics and international relations, the state has been privileged. Presumably, what has been done by a state to other states is implicitly regarded as the doings of the people of a state to the other states' peoples. In spite of the existence of diverse actors in a state, once the state enters into international politics, the different views of their domestic actors disappears and they become unified under the view of the state. In other words, the state become their representative. While an imposed collective identity of the community on the individual, or the existence of a collective identity *ex hypothesi* argued to apply to others, has been subjected to severe sociological criticism, the position of the state in international politics has survived largely unscathed. Even though non-governmental organizations began to exert a considerable influence in state-centered politics regarding ecological, economic, humanitarian issues and so forth, their involvements in security issues and territorial and military disputes remain insignificant. Even an immediate re-questioning from foreign peoples to Koreans, "Do you mean that we do not like peace as much as you, Koreans?", "Are we more aggressive and troublesome than you?" and a further conceptual critique of the underpinning assumption of the holistic view of peoples' characters in the Korean claim, would not suffice to sway the effects of the Koreans' accumulated harsh experiences of strife in their country. The rigid idea of 'we', Koreans and the claim of loving peace and being non-aggressive are a historically shaped self-satisfactory justification for a problematic regional politics.

It would be doubtful whether historical claims could be justified, either without corroborating factual evidence at the 'ultimate' level, or without implicit discrimination against

others in the hierarchy of moral status. However, the interim conclusion, that factual evaluation cannot extricate itself from the contextual background of historical facts and the situational particularity of 'claiming' something, demands a most careful and detailed understanding of historical facts. Furthermore, the denial of claims demands a better historical evaluation and a normative criticism of the moral hierarchy that is inescapably mapped in a context. In other words, for the Korean claims, the denial of their non-invasion of other states and their non-interference tradition, and the normative critique of a comparative evaluation of non-aggressiveness, are also contextual responses. If these responses are undermined by the intention to defensively justify the historically evaluated aggressiveness of other regional powers with expansionist ambitions and further, if they still contribute to the maintenance of a problematic historical tradition, then the proponents of this counter-critique must also be criticized.

The particularity of Korean nationalism, if such a thing exists, would be that it becomes significantly responsive to the provocative claims of state sovereignty for political and economic agendas, as much as for cultural issues. The mode of response has not only been collective, but also so furious as to brook no opposition. It is the collective memory of Korean history that has condemned innocent Koreans to suffer at the hands of external powers, many instantly responding to national issues with a sort of spirit of self-sacrifice. Such a historically accumulated mode of behavior reflects the psychological status of *han*, which is extremely powerful in Koreans' self-interpretation as victims, on the one hand, and the world as the unfair entity from which the self is suffering, on the other.

To me the worst scenario, that has ramifications for the political geography in East Asia after the reunification of Korea, does not come from the Koreans, the ambitious project of the restoration of Manchu (Ahn, 1990), or from the political payback for the colonial experience and the division of the Korean peninsula. Rather, it concerns the possible misjudgment of neighboring states, oblivious to or choosing to ignore Koreans' psychological instability, which must last for the time being, in dealing with any political,

military or economic agenda. Extrapolating from historical form, it is unlike that Korean political actors would take any initiative in regional politics. However, they must be ready to react to the emerging situation, unlikely their predecessors, because nationalism is now so deeply rooted in Korean society as to possibly lead public discourse to extreme and risky paths.

2 The desirability of a new boundary-oriented politics and the remaining political dangers

2.1 Korean Unification: A necessity of a national project in the “post-national” era

The (South) Korean debate on the (re)unification of Korea clearly shows the current state of the Korean social sciences in dealing with national issues. While the romantic way of arguing the necessity for unification introduces a diagnosis for Koreans who suffer under the division of the Korean peninsula, its basic perspective is to restore the tradition of a united Korea. In other words, it is a past-oriented idea of dealing with current problems. However, some social scientists have discovered the necessity for unification in reasons other than those of cultural homogeneity or a communitarian idea of collective memory, that is to say, from the political situation of two Korean states. They emphasize the limited nature of democracy in South Korea within a divided country. As I have shown, the hostile relationship between the two states and supporting conservative-networks have had a strong impact on domestic politics towards the maintenance of authoritarian regimes. The democrats’ position within unification discourse reflects the relationship between the system of a divided Korea and domestic politics. In other words, South Korea itself is understood by them as ‘the blockaded polity’ due to the conflictual political structure firmly rooted in ideological tensions among political actors, where a divided country operates as

a negative imperative on democratization.¹⁰ Another political position advocating the unification of Korea exists outside of unification movements. The authoritarian state and a rigidly rooted conservative-network also argue the necessity of unification. However, for many reasons, their standpoints exist only in a nominal way. Their hostile attitude to their North Korean counterparts has failed to make any significant contributions to the unification discourse, and they continue to propose absorption of the other. It could be argued that just as much as the South Korean conservatives, many leading political groups in North Korea have the same type of stubborn policy towards South Korea. Nevertheless, their different ideological backgrounds and different historical experiences in tension, have fostered a quite different orientation toward unification.

This is a highly particular political discourse based on a type of boundary-politics directly intending to change or maintain the political boundary itself. Especially when the issue of democracy is tied to it, it cannot be classified as a nationalist claim for unification. For the unification of Korea itself is not put forward as the ultimate task for the people in Korea. Rather it is argued as the correct path for a democratic reshaping of politics on behalf of the people in the Korean context. It is supported by a realistic conclusion that deconstructing the division system for Korea is entirely necessary, for without it the democratic reshaping of South Korean politics could not be achieved. From the problems arising from the existence of a rigid boundary politics and from its alternatives pertaining to the Korean context, the general understanding of the problems of the nation-state in dealing with national and international issues could be considerably revised. For the

¹⁰Crozier's (1994, 1987, 1982) investigation of the French situation in which many actors in several French organizational systems form a collective human tension with other actors, led him to coin the term, *société bloquée*. While rigid bureaucratic conditions, historically developed in French organizational culture as the major organizational problem for French society, is clearly described in his analysis, Crozier suggests an institutional alternative in new policy-orientations for state affairs through which the bureaucratic system and the problematic actors - technocrats, for example - are cured. For some Korean social scientists, South Korea, as the structurally blockaded polity - the descriptive term paraphrased from the Crozierian idea of the problem of social systems in a Korean political context - could not be fully cured - this would mean the democratization of politics - by any institutional consequence of the political relationships between the conservative network and democratic actors. Rather the process of unification of two Korean states is understood as one of the major conditions for the political development of democracy.

national setting of boundary politics under the European experience does not, *pari passu*, apply to the East Asian region, where the construction of nation-states has a relatively long history. For some political actors in Korea making the nation-state is an incomplete and highly urgent project of the twenty-first century, despite the historical memory of the nation-state system that is deeply rooted in historiography. This could then be introduced as the critical example of an evolutionist idea for the history of political integration; from city-state to regional supra-national state via the nation-state.

2.2 European Integration: the necessity of a regional project beyond civilizational backgrounds

In terms of evaluating the problems of civilizational analyses in the social sciences, the discourse on the current process of European integration could be highly productive, in the double sense of identifying open possibilities for deconstructing a rigid collective identity or enclosing it within a negative development. In other words, it seems impossible to avoid the basic inquiry on the feasibility of Europe as a civilizational boundary, an inquiry that is in itself enough to determine, or at least to influence, the beginning and the end of current economic and political integration in the region (see, Patocka, 2002 for the philosophical construction; Rietbergen, 1998 for cultural development). Even though the beginning of institutional development for economic integration was shaped by the economic and political interests of some states, the accelerating process of economic and political integration since the 1990s has been driven by the high national interests of the member states.

In how many works are the civilizational backgrounds introduced for identifying the reasons for current European integration? While there could be very different perceptions on this matter among a number of states indirectly or directly related to the integration process, it is hardly as influential as current political and economic interests. The civilizational analysis could be understood, at best, as a marginalized approach, even though one

could argue that it provides a mode for the reinterpretation of major issues in the policy-making process. However, while it is certainly true that many scholars are rather reluctant to investigate civilizational agendas in the public discourse, because they might fundamentally determine the pursuit of political and economic integration, it is desirable that the civilizational interpretation of European integration should be more widely dealt with in intellectual discourse. The most powerful merit and demerit, at the same time, of civilizational analysis as such, is its instant relevance for the question of what Europe is, which, although very general, is quite a basic question, with huge implications for 'EUROPEAN' integration.

The civilizational framework could have a significant impact on the current integration process, as a means of finding its major rationale in the long-term history of the region (Spohn, 2000a, 2000b; Delanty, 2001a, 1995). The problem of utilizing a civilizational framework is that it exclusively sets a boundary as the container of homogeneous backgrounds for members within the boundary. The development of the nation-state system based on a grand scale in the enlightened political projects in the European region, has regulated, to some extent, the religious influences over politics and economic activities, even though its expansion to other regions has been partly dependent on the idea of a 'civilizing mission' including religion. The occurrence of major military conflicts in the twentieth century, including the impact of the Russian revolution in 1917, could be understood as the consequence of the tension between national and regional identity.

It does not appear beyond the realms of possibility to anticipate the possible emergence of a new situation in which religious factors, cultural elements and any type of enlightenment projects could be reconnected, once the regulative power of nation-oriented politics becomes less influential. Although this is a very simple anticipation, it is very difficult to ignore, because at least in the intellectual history concerned with civilizational analysis, the exclusive formation of a civilizational boundary is seldom criticized. In other words, whereas the substance of European civilizations has often been critically dealt with in

intellectual works, the idea of a European civilization has not itself been subjected to fundamental criticism. Recent debates on Eurocentrism (Wallerstein, 1998, 1997; McLennan, 2000) and Fundamentalist movements (Eisenstadt, 2000a, 1999) could be categorized in the former trend rather than the latter. Following the latter orientation, could one argue that European civilization historically never existed? It is possible to approach this question in several ways. However, as I noted in the introduction, any objective answers based on an atemporal perspective immediately face the critical dilemma, that the process of ascertaining the contents of European civilization could not fully exclude an additional construction of its counterparts. In other words, proving the existence of European civilization is to unavoidably pass comment on any form of non-European civilization and recognizing its contents is only possible when its counterparts are at least partially alluded to. However, this also applies to the atemporality of hermeneutic critique that focuses on the structural formation of comparative elements. A more sophisticated and indirect suggestion of the contents of European civilization occurs when the origins of some institutional frameworks for politics and economic activities, on the one hand, and for cultural and religious ones, on the other, are emphasized, while being detached from any initial boundary of creation. The primary purpose of investigating the detaching/attaching process - whatever terms in different nuance are additionally used: exportation/importation, expansion/reaching, implantation, replacement, etc. - is not to compare boundaries themselves but to highlight the development of institutions from one place to another and to investigate any possible changes within this movement. Some comparative works in the recent debate on multiple modernities and many works in regional studies could be classified under this approach. I currently see that the idea of multiple modernities is tied up with a boundary-oriented comparative sociology in which the assumption of the existence of a clear border between several political and cultural entities partly determines the direction of comparative and historical research (see, Friese and Wagner 2000b for the critique of the culturalist understanding of multiple modernities).

The discourse on current European integration includes two important ways of understanding the historical flow of political actors in the European context: firstly, the significance of the boundary for political actors in a new political situation; secondly, reshaping political actors themselves in the changing boundary politics (see, Friese, Negri and Wagner, 2002 for new political construction of Europe; Friese and Wagner, 2002 for reviewing the philosophical dimension of the discourse). As far as the first theme is concerned, the relationship between an existing national boundary and an emerging regional one occupies a crucial place in the discourse, while the second theme needs to be reevaluated under the light of the change in political relationships between national actors in the regional boundary of a new politics. Behind the overall skepticism towards European integration, there is often the reasoning that the qualities of life for members of a nation-state, secured by the national boundary, would be disturbed by the process of integration, whereas integrationists assume that the current nation-state system is unable to provide better conditions, due to a changing political and economic situation that has ramifications for the national boundary. At the same time, skeptics anticipate that well-organized national institutional measurements, developed over a long period by the people, would be rendered useless by the decisions of representatives from extra-national communities, whereas integrationists argue that major policy decisions in the nation-state for the future of the nation are already under threat by global political and economic influences. Unlike practical skeptics and idealists, who concern themselves with procedural problems and the lack of clear normative orientations for the actual process of institutional development, some anti-integrationists are hell bent on fully securing state sovereignty from any external influence, while many integrationists intend to find a coordinated answer to state sovereignty in a regional framework.

What should be importantly recognized in the discourse on the current status of boundary politics in the European context is that the nation-state system becomes more and more treated as a historically produced political entity (see, Zimmermann, Didry and Wagner,

1999 for French and German experiences), for which further roles are contested in the contemporary situation. The difficult point for anti-integrationists in this issue, is that without considerable dependence on the symbolic totality of the nation and its political form, the nation-state, which has been constructed in processes of political and economic transformation on the grand scale, they could not suggest any new type of political and economic ways for maintaining the nation-state system. Because of their impotence in suggesting new political and economic projects for the nation, they take the conservative position against European integration, allowing them to see no positive possibilities in the on-going integration process. In short, the conservative position in the discourse on European integration is determined by their self-satisfaction for what they have achieved rather than preparing the way for what they have yet to achieve. However, there is also a problematic dimension for some integrationists who initially identify the integration process as the extension of the national project. One problem that occurred in the process of expanding the nation-state system, was to build clear borders between nation-states where some cultural communities were fragmented and where borders became the place for tension. The internal homogenization process at the regional level might again provoke this fragmenting process at its new borders. The perception of the existence of borders, intertwined with a strong regional identity - in the era of national building it was a strong national identity - would occur when political actors interpret their policy-oriented practices within the normative framework of the boundary itself and symbolically totalized the European people as a whole. For the political actors who are required to justify their actions in policy discourse, at least partial engagement of their political vision in regional interests as much as national interests, is very difficult to avoid if they are to persuade the public and other participants in the discourse. And this, because an interest-based attitude plays such a big part in the current integration process. There is a lot of space for dealing with the issue of change; from national to regional politics and actors, likewise, in empirical research on the current stage of European integration. In a sense, it is arguable

that becoming a regional actor could provide a good opportunity to solve the dead-lock of issues at the national level (Bourdieu, 1998; Habermas, 2001; Zürn, 1999). In another sense, in the process of becoming regional actors, many national actors should have additional qualifications for dealing with regional issues at the national level and national issues at the regional level. However, when political actors limit their roles to those of agents of the boundary - in other words, the actors self-regulate their roles within the political structure, once made, but later regarded as the source of legitimacy - for representing regional interests, then boundary-oriented political activities would still be maintained in the actors' mode of practice.

Conclusion: Political Agendas of Modernity in Contemporary Korea and Europe

It seems fair to say that there has been a significant political transformation of Korean society since 1987, roughly correlative to the political experience of regime changes, the economic experience of the vulnerability of risk-taking developmentalism and the cultural experience of the fragmentation of traditional values. It is also observable that in the political sphere, major political discourses have shifted from achieving a democratic state through abolishing the authoritarian state as the most urgent political task, to developing fine democratic agendas adequate for Korean society and for achieving the unification of Korea. Within the observation of overwhelming uncertainties in dealing with newly emphasized political agendas, on the one hand, and within the anticipation that Korean society would be determined for the time being by the consequence of the totality of political actors' interactions, on the other, the current political situation could be recognized as a highly critical one for modernity in the Korean context.

When one considers that South Korea has been deeply involved in international politics

and the global economy, it is not so difficult to anticipate the double possibilities that the future of South Korea holds, simultaneously as impacted by and as impacting upon them. For this reason, the unification of Korea as the project of a new boundary politics, for example, could have an international meaning beyond the Korean community. At the same time, it is needless to say that the current process of European integration and its future directly influences and will make significant impact on global society. Thus, if modernity could be understood, without serious conceptual distinction between it and its counterparts, as emphasizing the meanings of contemporary political agendas, current Korean politics and European experience must be regarded by political actors as a new situation in which new political projects will necessarily materialize. When they present their own value orientations in practice, this could be understood as the actors' high fidelity to modernity in that they actively respond to their own contemporary *problematiques* (Wagner, 2001b).

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