

FROM RIVALRY TO CO-DEVELOPMENT: INTER-KOREAN
RELATIONSHIP AND THE CASE OF THE GERMAN REUNIFICATION

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With the apology of Pyongyang for the submarine infiltration incident, though a formal and insincere one in heart, a new round of North-South talks seems to be emerging. The prospect of an improved North-South relationship, however, is not so bright. Those who might have expected German-style reunification by the collapse of the Pyongyang regime must have been disappointed to have witnessed the tenacity of Pyongyang. Despite the ever-repeated pattern of North-South confrontation, there is a possibility that this confrontational posture could be changed. In the North, the crowning of Kim Jong-Il as the supreme leader of North Korea is almost certain to occur this year. In the South, a new president will be elected by the end of the year. With the prospect of a continued soft-landing policy by the U.S. toward Pyongyang, the new leadership in Seoul and the core elite in Pyongyang, with recovered confidence, could work together to build a more lasting frame of dialogue and ease of tension. In this regard, the case of the German reunification, which was accomplished in a very short time, can suggest many interesting points that deserve our attention in providing a long-term perspective on North-South relations including reunification.

*The Road to German Unification:
Perestroika, East German Democratic
Movement, and West German Prosperity*

The German unification came as a complete surprise. As late as 1989, politicians and

pundits were convinced that the Germany was divided for good. But one year later, on the night of October 2, 1990, people all over Germany were celebrating a newly unified homeland. The speed of the transformation was shocking and events rushed forward like a flood. The extent of the changes was stunning as well. All elaborate confederation scenarios of gradual reconciliation turned out to be wrong. The GDR simply dissolved itself. The free democratic order won out over the utopia of the real existing socialism. The rapidity and depth of the upheaval have left many people incredulous.

Obviously it is impossible to think of German reunification without the end of the Cold War which was triggered by Gorbachev's Perestroika. The reunification was unthinkable without the consent of the Soviet Russia. Miraculously Gorbachev agreed to the reunified Germany. In the middle of July 1990 Gorbachev offered to withdraw its forces from its World War II conquest in exchange for German disarmament and economic aid. Moscow accepted the extension of NATO to East Germany as long as no alliance troops were stationed there.

Britain and France also agreed on the condition that while the Germans would settle the internal aspects directly, international and security questions were to be discussed with the World War II victors (the two-plus-four formula). Germany's apologetic stance toward the war crime of World War II and the mood of a united Europe helped the four victors agree to the reunification. Assurances that the post-war borders, especially those with Poland, would be recognized helped speed the final settlement at the two-plus-four

negotiations.

The German unification was seen mostly as a contributing factor to the peace and stability of Europe, though not without old fears of German hegemony. In terms of international environment, Germany was lucky to have the opportunity of Soviet Russia being more concerned about the internal reform than international power politics. Germany's pursuit of peace and easing of tension with Soviet Russia and the Eastern bloc countries from 1972 made it possible to take advantage of this favourable international environment for rapid reunification.

If the favourable international environment was the essential external condition for the unification, the democratic awakening of the GDR constituted the internal condition. Despite the totalitarian rule of the SED, there had been criticisms and activities against the SED leadership. Perestroika also affected the reform movement in the GDR. Economic difficulties and aggravated political contradictions increased the hostility towards the regime. With the mass exodus from the GDR through Hungary and Austria during summer and fall of 1989, the activities of the opposition in the country increased. By October 1989, unprecedented images of mass demonstrations dominated the news. With the refusal to use Soviet troops by Gorbachev, Honecker did not dare to turn to force. Honecker was dismissed by the ruling SED in October 1989, which was followed by the November 4 demonstration in Berlin by more than 500,000 people.

The success of democratic movement accelerated the process of transformation. The succeeding Krenz government eased travel restrictions and opened the GDR borders to the West to win popular support. The opening of more crossing points in Berlin, however, allowed many GDR citizens to see for themselves the glittering "social market economy" of the West. Reformers of the ruling SED and grass-roots citizens' movement tried to democratize socialism in order to maintain the

independence of the GDR.

From December 1989, however, a nationalist and anti-socialist trend set in. A new group of people came out and chanted "We are one people." With the flair of emotions and excitement over the fall of Berlin Wall, the new head of the GDR, Modrow, promised reform and emphasized cooperation between the two German states by means of a contractual union. By this time, the reunification was conceived to be a gradual one. On November 28, Chancellor Kohl proposed in his "Ten-Point Plan" the creation of "confederative structures" leading up to a federal state, not an immediate unification.

However, the accelerating collapse of the planned economy was so serious that renewal in the GDR was thought to be impossible by early January of 1990. Bonn refused to shore up the falling GDR transition government. While beguiling millions of GDR citizens with the economic power and the splendour of a fully developed consumers' paradise, Kohl dictated the speedy introduction of the Deutschmark, and then the merger with West Germany. The Federal government and the West German political parties operated freely in East Germany and helped to destabilize it politically.

GDR reformers proved to be weak, naive and disunited. Even before the congressional election of March 1990, most political parties in the GDR had given up their course of a socialist independence and, bowing to pressure from Bonn, had adopted the idea of merging with the Federal Republic. Despite the social democrats and the leftist intellectuals' opposition who tried to avoid the incorporation into the capitalist system of the West Germany, Kohl pushed for the unification by campaigning in East Germany in its first free election in March 1990. The majority of East German citizens chose to believe Chancellor Kohl's promises of "flourishing landscapes," expecting that their western brethren would help bring prosperity and wealth. With the sponsorship of Kohl,

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the "Alliance for Germany" which represented those who aspired to join the West Germany, won the election by a large margin. The clear vote ended all attempts to democratize socialism in East Germany through a new constitution.

After the creation of a democratically legitimate East German government, which was essentially dependent on the Bonn government, domestic discussions shifted from civil society to economics. The treaty on monetary, economic and social union authorized the integration of the GDR into the market economy of the FRG. The currency union declared on July 1, 1990 allowed the 1:1 exchange of currencies of the DGR and FRG. This measure was designed to prevent the migration of East German residents to the West, as well as boost the purchasing power of the East and thereby ease the pains of system transformation. A trusteeship agency (Treuhandanstalt) was created to privatize state-owned property and thus transform the planned economy into a competitive market structure. Through the signing of the lengthy unification treaty on August 31, 1990, the East German states became part of the Federal Republic of Germany officially from October 3.

In short, the German experience shows that three elements are essential for the success of an absorption-type of reunification: 1) a withdrawal of support for the decaying system by the sponsoring international power; 2) the emergence of alternative elite in the decaying system who is willing to reform and unify the country; and 3) strong economic power of the absorbing system to provide for basic needs of the people of the decaying system and revamp the backward economy. While first and third points seem to be self-explanatory the second point deserves further explanation. The emergence of an alternative political elite which was willing to reform or to unify with the West Germany was an important step toward the peaceful and speedy reunification. Because if those democratizing elite groups had not been organized to take over the old totalitarian

regime, the conservatives among the ruling elite including the military could have emerged as the main opposition force to the reunification with veto power. The turn for the unification might have been halted and deterred. This is important especially because no democratic force can be expected in North Korea to organize itself and take care of matters of the transition and relationship with South Korea.

The Differing Context of Reunification between Germany and Korea

To draw some useful implications from the German experience of unification we need to take into consideration the difference in the environments of Germany and Korea. First, in contrast to the Soviet Union's leaving the East German ship sinking, the soft-landing policy of the U.S. is supporting the survival of the Pyongyang regime by trying to prevent its sudden collapse. The real intention of South Korea, which is not excluding the possibility of unification through the collapse of Pyongyang, has been thwarted by the U.S. attempt to maintain status quo on the Korean peninsula.

Second, the Pyongyang regime has survived and will continue to survive the collapse of the socialist system in Eastern bloc. Despite the crisis in the economy, it has strengthened its grip on the people. There is no sign of organized resistance against the ruling group of North Korea, nor reports of disunity among the core elite. Lacking any civil resistance or the challenge from the inner circle, attempts to reform the country have been negligible. Instead of widespread reform, it has sought to secure its survival through blackmail and brinkmanship against Seoul and Washington. At the moment, there seems to be little chance of North Korea being transformed or collapsing from inside. Moreover, due to the information

control and ideological brainwashing, many people in North Korea are not well aware of what life is like in South Korea. Rather they seem to have no other option but to follow the line of "Socialism on our own." The internal pressure to unify with South Korea or to accept its capitalist lifestyle cannot be formed at this moment.

Finally, South Korea does not have the economic strength West Germany possessed nor the willingness to bear the economic burden of unification after witnessing the difficulties of the unified Germany.

All these suggest that the external and internal conditions for the reunification of Korea are quite different from those of Germany. While East Germany, after giving up the idea of repressing the democratic movement, had to go along with the wave of change and transformation, North Korea still maintains a cohesion among its core elite, and its armed forces are capable of inflicting huge damage on Seoul. The economic crisis has not led to the shake-up of the top elite nor a reform movement but to heightened military preparedness in case of provoking a desperate war. The U.S.'s soft-landing policy also works as a bulwark against the collapse of North Korea. Moreover, Pyongyang must have learned from the German experience that the interchange of people and information could trigger unstoppable change against the security of its own socialist system.

If we agree to the premise that the Pyongyang regime will last for a substantial period of time then Seoul has to devise a long-term strategy to induce the Pyongyang regime to the dialogue table. Seoul has made it clear that it wants dialogue with Pyongyang and even now is making every effort to make Pyongyang participate in the four-party talks. However, it seems that Pyongyang is not ready to come out yet for the talks, partly because it suspects that Seoul's real intention is to deepen the crisis of Pyongyang. For the success of four-party talks Seoul needs to

make clear that it does not expect nor want the collapse of Pyongyang, not just by the official statement but by the act.

Despite the official reconciliatory posture, overwhelmed by the emotional exasperation and sense of betrayal, Seoul tends to lose coherence in its policy toward Pyongyang. Seoul has been easy prey to Pyongyang's verbal and physical provocation strategy. This means that Seoul has been playing Pyongyang's game. To escape this chicken-game situation in which both parties are competing for the audacity to risk a catastrophic outcome, which is more hazardous to Seoul, Seoul needs to revise the rules of the game by including the U.S. and Japan in encouraging Pyongyang's cooperative response pattern. Seoul has been restraining the initiatives of the U.S. and Japan to develop relations with Pyongyang on the basis of the principle of parallel reconciliation with the North. It was a reflection of the fear of losing its voice and being alienated in determining its own future. To the extent that Seoul needs to maintain leverage, this is the right choice. However, we need to rethink how effective this strategy is in terms of bringing the Pyongyang regime in line with Seoul's goal, and whether there is no other alternative to maintain influence, given the fact that none of the conditions of an absorption-type reunification exist in the Korean context.

In Search of a Long-Term Strategy for Reunification: From Rivalry to Co-development

Assuming that the Pyongyang regime will not fall in short time, then preparation for reunification with the German case in mind would not be of much help. The context of reunification is quite different. In the German case the opportunity for reunification came suddenly and Bonn was able to grasp it. In the Korean case

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that rare opportunity seems to be a remote possibility. Of course, this does not mean that we may as well not prepare for the possible sudden collapse of the Pyongyang regime.

Seoul's existing reunification policy, based on the idea of a national community of the Korean people as a historical entity, is losing its pertinence due to the internationalization of Korean affairs. Nor is its stage-oriented scheme, from reconciliation to the establishment of Commonwealth, and to the final integration, particularly insightful in showing how two hostile systems can find the way to rapprochement. It is not a strategy but description of stages of integration.

In order to produce workable scheme of reunification as well as the real easing of tensions on the Korean peninsula, we have to take into consideration the fact that the existing Pyongyang regime will last for a substantial period of time, that Seoul has to deal with the headaching Pyongyang regime as a partner, and that there is strong repressed pressure for the improvement of relations with Pyongyang on the part of the U.S. and Japan. This unfavorable situation, opposite to the German context of unification, suggests that Seoul develop an alternative perspective rather than holding on to an existing policy which has proven to be inefficient in opening a new horizon in dealing with the North.

The existing Seoul policy toward Pyongyang, that is, the policy of check and restraint on Pyongyang's attempts to develop relations with the U.S. and Japan, on the one hand, and expedient adaptation to the domestic political needs and international environment, on the other, lacks an element of vision for the future. The new strategy has to deal with how to convert the goal of the Pyongyang regime from a system of maintenance to a system of reform.

Pyongyang needs to recover its confidence in order not to avoid dialogue and contact with Seoul. In this respect, Seoul should adopt the policy of encouraging economic cooperation at the

non-governmental level. Instead of the Government's controlling all aspects of communications and exchanges of people and economic resources, the South Korean government can simply stand aside and watch how the private initiatives of South Korean entrepreneurs go. In the case of China-Taiwan relations, the economic advance of Taiwan capital into mainland China accompanied with the exchange of visits was allowed even when the two countries confronted each other over Taiwan's status in the international arena. There is no reason why two Koreas in the midst of political confrontation cannot develop close economic ties. The South has capital and technology which is very useful to the North. Pyongyang has encouraged the participation of the South's industrialists in the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone.

The South missed those opportunities when it tried to affect the economic decisions of the companies who were interested in investing in the Rajin-Sonbong area. The involvement with and participation in the North's economic and investment scheme by the entrepreneurs of the South could be a precious asset in strengthening economic ties and some influence over Pyongyang, and eventually political assimilation between the two Koreas. In this respect, participation and involvement of the South in the development plan and in the measures to ease the economic crisis, including food aid, while leaving the dynamics of political interaction between Seoul and Pyongyang to find its proper course, seem to be the appropriate first step to lead North Korea toward reconciliation and deeper reform. The fear that a rejuvenated North might be a threat to the South seems to be an exaggeration, once the relationship with the U.S. and Japan is improved. Then provocation of war against the South is out of the question. Pyongyang has even already mentioned its willingness to approve American troops stationed in the South.

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