

binoculars: representing the two Koreas
looking forward to a united future

Unification of the Mind: Conference Envisioning Reunified Korea

Hosted by ENoK & NKUS
Sponsored by National Unification Advisory Council – Chicago Chapter

On June 21st and 22nd, 2013, ENoK hosted its first conference in collaboration with NKUS. The vision of the conference was the “Unification of the Mind.” The organizers first conceived this conference because they wanted to *dream*. They wanted the participants—the young generation of our time—to *envision* a Korean society where no one group is looked down upon, belittled, or undermined by another on account of their different accents, different appearances, or different backgrounds, but rather these differences are embraced. ENoK wanted anyone with love for the Korean peninsula—whether he or she is from South Korea, North Korea, or America—to be *united in one mind*.

In order to encourage the conference participants to envision such Korea, the organizers devoted the bulk of the conference program to what they called the Problem-Solving Activities (PSAs), in which the participants would be divided into different groups, and within each group, participants would take on particular roles in a simulated setting and solve a given problem as a group. The organizers’ vision was, through this type of interactive activities, the participants will have an opportunity to share their own views and hear the perspectives of others from different backgrounds on issues related to the PSA problems and also share personal stories and experiences with each other. In this way, the conference could help break down any existing “walls of the mind”—prejudice against and/or misconceptions of people from other backgrounds—among the participants.

In addition to the PSAs, ENoK also invited two guest speakers who shared about two countries that had experienced a separation within themselves. Also, the participants shared food (three meals together), clothes (conference T-shirts provided by ENoK), and lodging, which

furthered the conference goal of bringing people from different backgrounds closer together.

PARTICIPANTS

Throughout this two-day event, a total of forty-three participants attended the conference. Forty-one attendees were present to listen to the guest speakers on Friday, June 21st; thirty-two participants attended the conference to partake in the program on Saturday, June 22nd. Thirty people attended the conference both days. While the majority of the participants came from the Washington DC metropolitan area, about a quarter of the participants had flown or driven from out-of-state areas to attend the event. The demographics of forty-three participants were: nineteen South Koreans, ten North Koreans (defectors), nine Korean Americans and five non-Korean Americans. Over a quarter of participants had no past experience of interacting with other demographic groups, especially with North Korean defectors.



Brothers from South and North Korea ☺



Participants From Chicago



With Professors (Day 1)

PAST CASES OF DIVIDED COUNTRIES

Whereas the bulk of the “Unification of the Mind” Conference was devoted toward interactive PSAs, the organizers recognized the need for the conference participants to hear from experts, especially in order to prepare them for the PSAs. To this end, the organizers invited two guest speakers versed in cases of divided nations to speak on the first day of the conference.

When Koreans talk about reunification, many automatically think of the German model of reunification—i.e. South Korea absorbing North Korea. For human rights reasons, ENoK believes that this model is obviously better than the North Korean regime somehow taking over the entire peninsula. However, the organizers wanted to envision a unified Korea that they truly wanted to see, not what they would like to settle for, with the belief that if one does not dream, what *could be* will always remain what *could have been*. The organizers believed that the young generation should think outside the box, not limiting themselves to the apparent status quo. “If reunification were to happen right now with South Korea absorbing North Korea, the problems existing in South Korea will not only remain but double with the size of the country plus other social issues that will

arise as a result of unification,” they thought to themselves, “Could there be another model? Could there be a brand new model of reunified Korea where neither North Koreans nor South Koreans are “above” the other?”

In accordance with this vision, ENoK wished to hear the experiences of other countries that have gone through reunification in addition to Germany. The Vietnamese case, albeit reunified by a communist regime, seemed relevant and interesting because Vietnamese had fought a war amongst themselves just as Koreans had—not to mention Vietnam’s greater cultural proximity to Korea than Germany. Also, the U.S. was heavily involved in the Vietnam War as well as in the Korean War.

1. Germany

First, we heard from Professor Mary Beth Stein, an Associate Professor of German and International Affairs at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs. She teaches 19th and 20th century German literature and culture as well as a new course called Berlin Before and After the Wall.



Professor Stein accurately described the German reunification as an accession of a smaller and poorer state to a larger and more powerful core state; Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic were not equal states or partners in unification. “The greatest obstacle to unification remains the cognitive distance between East and West Germans (the wall in the mind),” she said, “The phenomenon of ‘the Wall in one’s head’ persists, in clear differences in attitudes, values, and visions for the future.” Professor Stein recommended the round table discussion, civil movements, and victim-perpetrator conversations (e.g. in a church setting) as effective conciliatory methods after reunification.

2. Vietnam

After Professor Stein’s lecture on the experience of German reunification, we heard from Professor Shawn McHale, an Associate Professor of History and International Affairs also at George Washington University’s Elliott School, where he teaches Southeast Asian, Vietnamese, and East Asian history, comparative study of colonialism, and its legacy as well as its memory and history.



Professor McHale focused on the concept of the “victors’ justice.” “Communist victors were too drunk with their victory,” he said, “Victors always make mistakes.” He emphasized the failure of repressive, draconian measures against the conquered (e.g. re-education camps). Another central point he conveyed was the importance of non-political interactions that help break down barriers between people from two hostile groups. The reunification comes in the political level, but unity and reconciliation may not happen through policies, but through economic and cultural activities that encourage more interactions between the two groups of people. In the short term, such increased interactions may give rise to more conflicts, but in the long term, they help pave the way for “real” reunification. The last point Professor McHale emphasized was the role of the young people, who are likely to be less biased than their older counterparts.

PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITIES

Problem-Solving Activities (PSAs) constituted the core part of the conference. The purpose of PSAs was to encourage young leaders from vastly different backgrounds to imagine and dream of a new unified Korea and develop an efficient model of collaboration both in the process and in the event of unification. For the purpose of the activities, participants were asked to assume the reunification had taken place.

There were two sessions and five problem areas/groups per session. Each participant was asked to participate in both sessions. During the registration, participants were asked to choose their preferences among ten problem areas. Participants were assigned to different

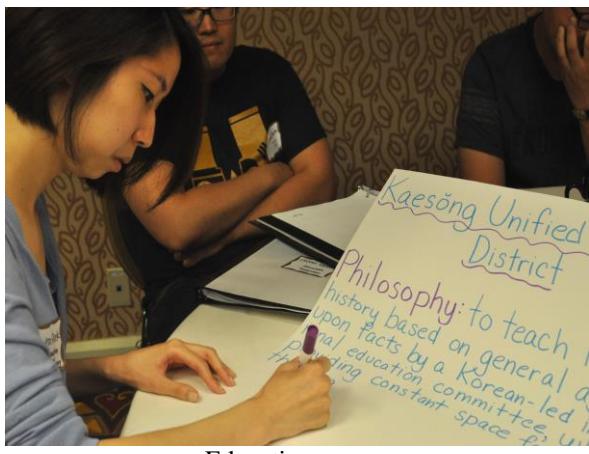
groups according to their preferences, backgrounds, and language proficiencies. Each group had five to eight members. The first session introduced “North vs. South” problems—

- Education: Teaching Korean History
- Welfare: Healthcare for New Korea
- Transportation: Building a Peninsular Network of Transportation
- Foreign Affairs: US Troops in Reunified Korea?
- Culture: *Saturday Night Live: ENoK* (Comedy Skit)

The second session introduced “Korean” problems—

- Energy & Environment: Green Campaign
- National Security: Constructing the “Korean” Identity
- Economy: Conglomerates (“*Chae-beol*”) in Reunified Korea
- Society: Women’s Rights in Reunified Korea
- Government: The Constitution

Each group, led by a pre-designated group leader, was given 1) a specific setting, 2) a problem, 3) roles, and 4) auxiliary issues to consider, with which they can work.



Education group



Welfare Group



Environment & Energy group

The success of PSAs was entirely dependent upon the active participation of the conference attendees. Thanks to the attendees’ energy and enthusiasm for the conference, the organizers were able to witness the participants, despite their many differences, truly come together and make the PSA sessions a meaningful experience. The only way to explain this unity seemed to be every participant’s shared belief and love for the Korean peninsula. In the end, participants not only came up with great solutions for their given problems but also learned from each other’s personal stories and ideas. For example, a non-Korean American participant said that during the PSA session, he came to learn that the “know-it-all” mentality when aiding underdeveloped countries could actually be harmful. This was an example of a direct positive impact of the PSAs.

EXPENDITURES

"Unification of the Mind" Conference				
Budget		Expenditure		Difference
Compensation		Compensation		Compensation
Guest Speaker 1	\$ 1,000	Guest Speaker 1	\$ 1,000.00	\$ -
Guest Speaker 2	\$ 1,000	Guest Speaker 2	\$ 1,000.00	\$ -
Subtotal	\$ 2,000	Subtotal	\$ 2,000.00	\$ -
Conference Room 2-day reservation		Conference Room 2-day reservation		Conference Room 2-day reservation
6/21/2013 4:00pm-10:00pm	\$ 350	6/21/2013 4:00pm-10:00pm	\$ 350.00	\$ -
6/22/2013 8:00am-10:00pm	\$ 550	6/22/2013 8:00am-10:00pm	\$ 550.00	\$ -
Service Charge	22%	Service Charge	22.00%	0%
Tax	10%	Tax	6.9%	3%
Subtotal	\$ 1,208	Subtotal	\$ 1,173.76	\$ 34.04
Audiovisual Equipment		Audiovisual Equipment		Audiovisual Equipment
Presidential Podium		Presidential Podium		
Microphone	\$ 65	Microphone + Screen	\$ 105.00	\$ (40.00)
Quantity (Days)	2	Quantity	2	0
Service Charge	22%	Service Charge	22.00%	0%
Tax	10%	Tax	5.5%	5%
Subtotal	\$ 174	Subtotal	\$ 270.29	\$ (95.83)
Lodging		Lodging		Lodging
Total Lodging Cost	\$ 528	Total Lodging Cost	\$ 696.15	\$ (168.15)
Rate per room	\$ 120	Rate per room	\$ 105.00	\$ 15.00
Quantity	4	Quantity	6	-2
Tax	10%	Tax	10.5%	0%
Subtotal	\$ 528	Subtotal	\$ 696.15	\$ (168.15)
Food		Food		Food
6/21/2013 Dinner (per person)	\$ 40	6/21/2013 Dinner (per person)	\$ 37.95	\$ 2.05
6/22/2013 American Breakfast (per person)	\$ 30	6/22/2013 American Breakfast (per person)	\$ 29.95	\$ 0.05
6/22/2013 Lunch (per person)	\$ 30	6/22/2013 Lunch (per person)	\$ 27.95	\$ 2.05
Quantity (persons)	40	Quantity (persons)	40	0
6/22/2013 Afternoon Break	\$ 296	6/22/2013 Afternoon Break	\$ 237.25	\$ 58.75
Assorted Soft Drinks per each	\$ 5	Assorted Soft Drinks per each	\$ 4.95	\$ 0.05
Quantity	40	Quantity	35	5
Freshly Baked Cookies per dozen	\$ 32	Freshly Baked Cookies per dozen	\$ 32.00	\$ -
Quantity	3	Quantity	2	1
Service Charge	22%	Service Charge	22.0%	0%
Tax	10.0%	Tax	9.0%	1%
Subtotal	\$ 5,765	Subtotal	\$ 5,413.95	\$ 351.28
Miscellaneous		Miscellaneous		
		T-shirts	\$353.00	
		Folders	\$85.00	
		Printing + Stationery	\$193.75	
		Flight	\$519.60	
Subtotal	\$ 1,000	Subtotal	\$ 1,151.35	\$ (151.35)
Total	\$ 10,675	Total	\$ 10,705.50	\$ (30.01)

REGISTRATION FEES

The registration fee per participant was \$20. There was a scholarship option for those who wished to have their registration paid by other donors. A total of \$680 registration fees were collected from thirty-four participants; nine other participants were waived as they were recognized as event aides. Out of those thirty-four, seven people asked for the scholarship option. Two private donors' generous donation covered the amount of \$140 for these seven participants.

The registration fees collected had originally been intended to cover the conference expenditures; however, two weeks before the conference, NKUS, the co-host of the event, received news about a fellow North Korean refugee in the U.S. Mr. Jo (alias) was injured while he was being mugged, which left him in a critical condition. Hearing this news, the organizers decided to use 100% of the registration fees to help Mr. Jo in any way possible. \$680, was then delivered to NKUS after the conference. It will be used in the near future helping with Mr. Jo's recovery back from the hospital.



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CONCLUSION

One of the four pillars of ENoK's mission is "Breaking down prejudice and

discrimination against North Korean defectors." The "Unification of the Mind" Conference was largely aimed at accomplishing this mission. The "Unification of the Mind" Conference attempted to provide a venue for people from diverse backgrounds to come together, work together, and eventually have a better and deeper understanding of each other.

In a way, the "Unification of the Mind" Conference was an extension of ENOK's *RealPal* Program for North Korean defectors. *RealPal* reflects the philosophy of the program's mission to serve North Korean defectors, not as "teachers," "sponsors," or "benefactors," but as genuine friends, brothers, and sisters. ENOK believes that the friendships formed in this way help break down the wall of prejudice between the "Pals" and the defectors we serve.

As Professor Stein used the phrase, "the wall in the mind," in her lecture on the first day of the conference, the greatest challenge with regard to the unification in the Korean peninsula is neither the political nor economic integration—albeit these challenges are great on their own, but overcoming the mental walls that divide North and South Koreans socially and culturally. Just as Professor McHale stated during his lecture, "The promise of unification in Vietnam is with the young age cohorts," the mission to dream and realize this unification of the mind in Korea lies with its young generation.

