

Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas: Understanding the Borderlands of Division as the Testing Grounds for Reunification

Monica Hahn

This article is a study of the legacy of the Korean War, as well as being a case study on the first instance of regime transition in the Cold War era. This study compares the incorporation of “Reclaimed Areas” (*subokjigu*) by South Korea with the incorporation of “Newly Liberated Areas” (*sinhaebangjigu*) by North Korea comprehensively from the aspects of occupation, politics, economics, and national identity. Both South Korea’s transplantation of capitalism in the Reclaimed Areas and the expansion of North Korea’s “people’s democracy” (*inminminjuui*) took place unilaterally and in a Cold War fashion. Changes to the national identities in each region took place in silence and conformity, paradoxically illustrating the pain and suffering felt while each region was incorporated into an unyielding regime.

Keywords Korean War, Reclaimed Areas, Newly Liberated Areas, 38th parallel-demilitarized zone (DMZ) inter-border region, reunification of the two Koreas, Cold War regime transition

Introduction

The division of Korea and the Korean War yielded two exceptional zones known as “Reclaimed Areas” (*subokjigu*) and “Newly Liberated Areas” (*sinhaebangjigu*). Coinciding with its liberation from Imperial Japan in 1945, the Korean Peninsula was split into north and south along the 38th parallel by the Soviet Union and the United States, and the Cold War world system quickly emerged thereafter. In August and September of 1948, the establishment of two distinct and opposing governments—the Republic of Korea south of the 38th parallel and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea north of it—were proclaimed, culminating in a three-year war between the two beginning on June 25, 1950. As a result of the Korean War (1950-1953), the borderline dividing North and South Korea shifted from the 38th parallel to the Military Demarcation Line (Armistice Line), and the

Demilitarized Zone was established along this Military Demarcation Line. As a result, areas which were situated south of the 38th parallel, yet north of the DMZ as well as areas which were situated north of the 38th parallel yet south of the DMZ were formed. The former came to be known in North Korea as the Newly Liberated Areas while the latter were known in South Korea as the Reclaimed Areas.

These Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas are akin to what one could call minor areas of reunification created by the Korean War. As former North Korean regions that South Korea incorporated as a result of the Korean War, and former South Korean regions which were seized by North Korea, the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas are two regions that were unilaterally unified—that is, incorporated—via occupation. Inasmuch as each of these regions has their own historical experience in addition to having undergone incorporation into their counterpart's system, we are able to draw many practical lessons from these exceptional regions pertaining to the coming process of reunification and its aftermath.¹

The history of the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas can also offer us valuable information in terms of world history. As is well known, the transition of the socialist suzerain the Soviet Union along with other Eastern European nations to capitalist systems between 1989 and 1991 presented a monumental shift in world history. Preceding even this, South Vietnam had been integrated into a socialist system as a result of the Vietnam War. However, such regime transition had already transpired on the Korean Peninsula in 1950. Having experienced the exchange of South Korea's capitalist system for North Korea's socialist one and vice versa, the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas are the very first cases of Cold War regime transition.

As such, both of these exceptional regions are of the utmost significance to both modern Korean history and world history and bear crucial implications for our understanding of the occupation and violence of the Korean War, as well as the problems surrounding reunification and peace. By reflecting on the cases of the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas—that is, the experience of minor reunification achieved through the extreme violence of the Korean War—this article intends to explore a model of reunification and peace for which we must strive.

Up until now, there have been no studies that have comprehensively analyzed North and South Korean occupation policies throughout the Korean War, nor the emergence of and changes to the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas as legacies of such policies. Regarding North Korean occupying rule of South Korea, research has largely focused on the policies enacted by North Korea in South Korea in the early stage of the war (June to early September 1950) and the researchers' assessments of them. In contrast, research on South Korean occupation of North Korea has primarily highlighted the problem of

sovereignty over North Korean regions between October and early December of 1950. The majority of evaluations of each side's occupation policies have been split binarily into *hell vs. liberation* or *failure vs. success*, but increasingly, research on these subjects have progressed into empirical studies (Hahn 2012; Jeong et al. 2014). The regions and period of study have also been expanded to include the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas following the Korean War.

Research on Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas began to pick up in the late 2000s and 2010s (Hahn 2008, 2016, 2017; S. Kim 2010; Park 2012). But a majority of these studies focus on clarifying the regime changes in the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas respectively. As a result of these efforts, a certain degree of fundamental facts on these regime transitions and the historical significance of the regions have been revealed. Comparative research has also been conducted (Hahn 2015, 2018), and by looking at both the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas from the same viewpoint and analyzing them using identical standards these comparative studies have contributed to the effort to elucidate and interpret the regions' characteristics more clearly.

Nevertheless, directly comparing the regime transitions collinearly is no easy task. This is due to the fact that there are large differences in terms of the types of documentation and materials that can be used, including that regarding the human geographical conditions of each region or their experiences prior to liberation from Japan, and whether research methods such as field research and recorded oral statements are feasible. Moreover, for the sake of comparative research, there needs to be ample clarification of the basic facts, as well as diverse research and interpretations to back it up; but there is a problem of not yet having reached this stage. While bearing in mind the limitations of methodology and materials for analysis, the present study attempts to refer to existing studies as much as possible and comprehensively examine diverse materials produced by the governments and press in both North and South Korea.

This article compares South Korea's incorporation of the Reclaimed Areas with North Korea's incorporation of the Newly Liberated Areas. I shall examine their strategies for territory incorporation via military occupation, transformation of political regimes, transplantation of economic systems and changes in land ownership relations, as well as changes in national identity in the following sections of the article. The absence of any prior attempts to comprehensively compare these two experiences thus far lend the current study tremendous significance in terms of scholarship. The current study can be considered both an examination of the legacy of the Korean War, as well as a case study on the first instance of Cold War regime transition in the world. It is the author's sincere hope that the analysis presented in this article can become the basis for subsequent comparative studies with other world-historic instances of regime transition.

Military Occupation and Incorporation of Territories

The processes by which South Korea incorporated the Reclaimed Areas and North Korea incorporated the Newly Liberated Areas into their own territory during the Korean War can be outlined as having transpired in the following way. It first began with the movement of the front line of the war and its stalemate in 1951 in the area surrounding the 38th parallel. Following a series of large gains and losses in territory and experiences both of occupation and being occupied by both South and North Korea, the front line edged towards the vicinity of the 38th parallel. At the time, the line of combat formed a position similar to the current Military Demarcation Line, with the western region encompassing Kaesong and reaching south of it, and the eastern region reaching north of the 38th parallel. That is to say, the western regions south of the 38th parallel, and the eastern regions north of the same line had each become reoccupied by North Korea and South Korea (United Nations (UN) forces), respectively.

Subsequently, shifts came with ceasefire talks (armistice agreement). Armistice talks in Kaesong commenced nearly simultaneous to the 1951 stalemate on the line of combat. During these armistice talks, discussions of whether the military demarcation line would follow the 38th parallel, or instead follow the line of combat were hotly debated. Ultimately, it was decided that the line of war would become the Military Demarcation Line, and that until the Armistice Agreement was signed, combat would continue (Hermes 1968 [1966]). This meant that depending on North and South Korea's regions of military occupation, their territory was subject to change.²

As such, both North and South Korea fought tooth and nail to capture more area along the 38th parallel from the other. Due to the fact that there are strategically pivotal highlands located in the areas surrounding the 38th parallel which would force a withdraw of tens of kilometers once ceded, close combat without an inch of concession ensued between the two parties. As a testament to the intensity of the battles of the time, there remain in the areas of Cheorwon, Kimhwa, and Hwacheon places referred to as the sites of the Battle of White Horse, the Battle of Triangle Hill, the Battle of Bloody Ridge, and the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge, Christmas Hill, UN Hill in Yanggu, and the Battle of Seohwari-Hyangno Hill in Inje, and above the Military Demarcation Line there are those remembered as Stalin Hill and Mao Zedong Hill (*ibid.*).

Though North and South Korea's respective occupation of the western and central-eastern regions both happened on similar timelines, the points at which governance of said regions was introduced were different. In the spring and summer of 1951, North Korea had recaptured the western regions, which lay south of the 38th parallel, and governance was introduced immediately. In comparison, South Korea was unable to immediately begin its governance of the recaptured central-eastern regions which fell above the 38th parallel. In

this region, which corresponds to the category of Reclaimed Areas, military government overseen by the United Nations Command (UNC) was implemented, and Rhee Syngman's regime was obligated to wait for the United States, the UNC, and the United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK)'s decision to transfer governance to it. As a result, only once the UNC handed over administrative rights of the Reclaimed Areas on November 17, 1954, more than a year after the signing of the Armistice Agreement, was South Korea able to integrate the region into its governance. Moreover, when control of this region was ultimately ceded, in relation to the handling of the region, the United States had chosen handing over control after entertaining the thought of three procedures—continuation of the military government, creating a space separate from North and South Korea for UN supervision, and relinquishing it to South Korea. Regarding the characteristics of such relinquishment, the United States made clear that it was not a *de jure* handover, but a *de facto* one. Furthermore, the handover of administrative control of the Reclaimed Areas was bound to the encompassing application of the Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea in areas north of the 38th parallel, as well as the conclusion of the Agreed Minutes which retained UN military operational control of Korean forces by the Commander in Chief (CINC) UNC (Hahn 2008). Such a transference of the Reclaimed Areas also reaffirmed that the legal right to governance of Korea does not automatically extend to the North Korean region.³

Regarding the areas which were occupied following this process, South Korea designated the central-eastern region above the 38th parallel which it came to occupy the "Reclaimed Areas," while North Korea referred to the western area it occupied south of the 38th parallel as the "Newly Liberated Areas." These names reflected how each system perceived the territory of their counterpart. Though both North and South Korea had declared the establishment of each of their own sovereign governments, not only did they not recognize each other as governments, they went so far as to assert their own right of sovereignty over their counterpart's territory. Throughout the duration of the Korean War, both North and South Korea regarded their counterpart's attacks and occupation of their territory north and south of the 38th parallel as invasion and trespassing, while considering their own occupation of their counterpart's lands as recuperation. The assertion of sovereignty over their counterpart's land present in both governments' constitutions was the strongest basis of such perceptions. North Korea had, in its 1948 constitution, declared Seoul as its capital, while South Korea asserted that the territory of the Republic of Korea consisted of the entirety of the Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands. Thus, these areas of occupation signified to both North and South Korea areas of their original territory which had been recovered.

Transplanting Political Systems and Reshuffling Power Relations

Both regions underwent a reshuffling of power organizations almost immediately following their territorial occupation by either South Korea (UN forces) or North Korea. When the central-eastern areas north of the 38th parallel broke free from North Korean control, the first phenomenon to transpire was the sudden disappearance of the Korean Workers' Party, the People's Committees, and social organizations (Union of Agricultural Workers of Korea, Democratic Youth League of North Korea, Socialist Women's Union of Korea, and the General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea). Their abolition was so abrupt it invited doubts that they had ever been present in the region. In their wake, anticommunist security forces surfaced. Adult residents who had remained in the region very quickly, though sporadically, organized security forces. They then received the incoming South Korean and UN forces. Though it was the military which had seized this central-eastern region, during the period of UN military government, corps commanders in each region became military governors, tasked with constructing and managing civilian governments. Following the handover of administrative control to South Korea on November 17, 1954, the government reshuffled the administrative organizational structure. The People's Committees in counties (*kun*), townships (*myeon*), and villages (*ri*) were formally converted into administrative agencies such as county offices (*guncheong*) or town/township offices (*eup/myeon samuso*), wherein civil servants such as governors and mayors were appointed by the South Korean government. In addition, many anticommunist social organizations were founded.

Something quite the opposite occurred in the western regions south of the 38th parallel. Rather than South Korea's administrative organizations, North Korean People's Committees, the Workers' Party, and other social organizations reappeared. In the cases of Ongjin and South Yeonbaek, People's Committees and Workers' Party cells were established following North Korean reoccupation in January 1951 (South Yeonbaek People's Committee 1951b, 420-31). As for Kaesong, in September 1951, a Provisional People's Committee (Organizing Committee for the People's Committee of Kaesong) was formed and began its activities, and the Workers' Party of Kaesong along with the Democratic Youth League of North Korea, Socialist Women's Union of Korea, and others were restored. Following this, the number of people joining the Workers' Party in the Kaesong and Kaepung regions increased, and party cells in workplaces and rural areas were organized and expanded (*Kaesong Sinmun* 1952b; Workers' Party of Hwanghae Province Ongjin County Ongjin Township Eunpa Police Precinct Cell 1952, 756-59; Central Political Committee of the Korean Workers' Party 1951a, 160; 1951b, 160-61).

These accounts illustrate how quickly the transition to the political structures corresponding to North and South Korea occurred in each of these regions.

An important explanation for the swift reshuffling of political structures was that these regions had already experienced one round of occupation by North or South Korea, followed by withdrawal, only to finally be recaptured again. Before its final reoccupation by North Korea, the western region south of the 38th parallel had undergone occupation by North Korea in the summer of 1950, followed by North Korean withdrawal and South Korean recapture, while in the autumn of 1950 the central-eastern region north of the 38th parallel had undergone South Korean occupation, followed by South Korean withdrawal and North Korean recapture. Not only did this round of occupation force these areas to experience their counterpart's system, but also suffer atrocities, engendering defection to either North or South, both willful and otherwise. Then, once again, they confronted a state of reoccupation. Once they had abandoned the existing systems and anticipated the transplantation of the new, opposing regime, the various institutions and organizations (as well as their affiliated members) which had existed in the region would vanish, leaving only members of the new regime. The official legal measures—such as restructuring of administrative order and reshuffling of political structure via holding elections—taken by the respective occupying authorities, came into play in the aftermath of such initial reshuffling in the regions.

Yet another characteristic of the reshuffling of power structures in the two regions was their management and regulation of the regions via the dispatch and movement of outside figures. Rather than local residents, those who came from outside the regions dominated the main administrative positions of various organizations. In the case of the Reclaimed Areas, the majority of those appointed to leadership of counties were not locals, but those who had come from south of the 38th parallel, and candidates for the National Assembly also largely came from places outside the region.⁴ Similarly in the Newly Liberated Areas, at first a majority of those occupying positions of authority had been dispatched to the region and originally hailed from outside the region. In Kaesong and Kaepung, correspondents comprised of representatives from the Central Committee, the Cabinet, and social organizations were dispatched, while for Ongjin and South Yeonbaek, administrators who had been dispatched from the center to Hwanghae Province were selectively deployed, and the Vice-chairman of the Party in Hwanghae Province along with administrators of various social organizations repeated long-term deployment to the local area. “Administrators from almost completely different regions” were dispatched as supervisors of the Newly Liberated Areas, while locals were excluded from appointment to such positions due to their *songbun* social class and mistrust of families which had defected to the south during the war.

It was, however, neither possible nor efficient to bring in non-local residents to fill every personnel position. When attempting to regulate society or win the hearts and minds of its people, it is far more efficacious to appoint locals who

have well-founded knowledge of the region's community or a certain level of influence in the community. In the case of the Newly Liberated Areas, many Kaesong locals were appointed to leadership roles within organizations of political institutions, Workers' Party organizations, social organizations, economic and cultural agencies, factories, and enterprises, including Ri Jeongnyul, Organizing Chair of the Kaesong People's Committee, and Ri Kihyeok, Chairperson of the Kaesong Party Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea. Even Kim Myeongho, who was a guest editor of the *Kaesong Sinmun*, the Chairman of the Kaesong People's Committee in the latter half of the 1950s, as well as a representative in the Supreme People's Assembly, was a native of Kaesong (Song 2000, 120; S. Kim 2010, 85). As for the Reclaimed Areas, locals were generally appointed to rank-and-file administrative positions, and these were largely those with backgrounds as public servants or community leaders during Japanese occupation, with primary school educations and above. For instance, Choi Kyutae, who was the first leader of Inje township, had received education past the secondary level and even held a position as vice director of a financial association on a county level during Japanese colonization of Korea. The vice director of the financial association was a trustee appointed by the Governor General of Korea. Following liberation from Japan, he became a vice chairperson for the Inje county People's Committee, even becoming a member of the North Korean Worker's Party, though he later fled to South Korea. Once the Inje region was incorporated by South Korea following the War, he was named the leader of Inje township (Inje County, Gangwon Province 1962).

Both leading up to and throughout the Korean War, these people had undergone vetting of their ideologies or status in a number of manners. In the Newly Liberated Areas, Kim Myeongho, whose background had sparked controversy, had been "vouched for by Kim Il Sung" (Song 2000, 276-77) and Gong Jintae, the representative community leader in Kaesong who ran for the Supreme People's Assembly in 1956 had been a member of a City Council (*bu-hoi*) during Japanese imperial occupation and had served as director of internal affairs during the period of United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), had reflected on his past errors and cooperated with the North Korean state (*Kaesong Sinmun* 1953c). Beyond these cases as well, those who had opposed the USAMGIK (1945-1948) or had stepped forward as volunteer soldiers during the Korean War responded favorably to North Korea's policies, and went on to lead the regional community (*Kaesong Sinmun* 1954b, 1954d; Ri 1958). The lower-level administrative personnel in the Reclaimed Areas demonstrated a variety of anti-communist involvements—for example, community leaders or public servants during Japanese occupation, civilian personnel with USAGMIKs, anti-communist security force agents, Korean Youth Corps, and defection to the South.

However there remained suspicions surrounding the appointment of local

peoples to leadership roles on the part of both North and South Korean societies. In South Korea there were doubts cast on the appointment of people who had been under North Korean rule as “uncertain of what standards by which they had been appointed” whereas in North Korea there was disdain for such people as being of suspicious *songbun* or the family of deserters and those who had defected to the South. Moreover, both North and South Korea saw the locals as having low levels of ideology and consciousness. In regard to this, both North and South Korea carried out reeducation for locals who had been appointed to public positions. South Korea held weekly education courses and both long- and short-term training classes, with administrative training and anti-communism constituting its main themes. On the other hand, in order to foster the training of administrators originally from the Newly Liberated Areas, North Korea set up a three-month course at the Central Party School, as well as a three-month course at a managerial school in Southern Hwanghae Province, along with others. This signified more than the mere reeducation of locals; it was a means by which North Korea prepared for the future of North-South relations and the possibility of reunification.

As such, neither North nor South Korea altogether excluded locals from becoming government personnel, and, though only partially, appointed natives to roles of responsibility. In addition, by employing locals, they were able to win over or control the local communities, which they attempted to utilize in North-South relations. Though the locals had to take on a more determinedly cooperative and supportive attitude towards the state while still subject to numerous limitations such as suspicion and control, by doing so they were able to retain a certain amount of privilege, and were able to go on with their lives.

Transplantation of Economic Systems and Changes in Land Ownership Relations

The process of change in the economic structure of ownership was extremely complex in both the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas. To add to this, there were systemic contradictions and disagreements which arose between the existing pre-war system and the newly introduced systems. The degree of turmoil and the aspects of such contradictions and disagreements differed based on what stance North and South Korean state authorities took on the old system, and what type of demeanor with which they perceived it. The aspects and characteristics of this process can be outlined as follows.

Foremost, the complexity of land ownership relations in the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas was a result of precipitous change within a very short period. The Reclaimed Areas went from a tenant farming system at the time of liberation in 1945, to North Korean land reform in 1946, to tenure cultivation

under the UN military government, to South Korea's agricultural land reform in 1958. Though it may be easy to think that the process would have been relatively simpler in the Newly Liberated Areas because they did not have to undergo any steps like that of South Korea under the UN military government and were immediately incorporated into North Korea, the turmoil and complexity of changes were matched in North Korea as well. The landownership relations in this region were transformed from the tenant farming system at the time of liberation, to the disposal of the New Korea Company's farmlands during USAMGIK rule, to South Korean agrarian land reform in the spring of 1950, to North Korean land reform in the summer of 1950, followed by ownership relations following recapture by South Korea in the fall of 1950, the land survey project following reoccupation by North Korea in 1951, and the agricultural collectivization in the latter half of the 1950s. Each of these two regions went through change and change again when it came to land ownership relations over this thirteen-year period. As such, the changes in land ownership relations in each of the regions could not help but be interlocked with one another.

Second, the direct cause of the change in land ownership relations in both regions was the Korean War. This is because while undergoing occupation/being occupied during the War, there had been an overthrow of the system. Land reform had been enacted in 1946 in the central-eastern areas above the 38th parallel (the Reclaimed Areas), but as soon as this region was free from North Korean rule, the land ownership relations seemed to return to the state preceding the land reform. Moreover, during UN military rule, a temporary distribution of the right to cultivate occurred, and there were large swathes of land belonging to those whose whereabouts were unknown, including those who had defected to the North. In the western regions south of the 38th parallel (Newly Liberated Areas), farmland reform was enacted in the spring of 1950, but in that same summer land reform was enacted, only for it to become invalidated following recapture by South Korea in the fall of the same year, after which it was finally reoccupied by North Korea. Land which had belonged to absentee-landowners, including those who had defected south, was generated in this process.

Third, the manner of reforming land ownership relations in North and South Korea during this period was fundamentally a manner of transplanting their own economic systems. South Korea extended and implemented the Agricultural Land Reform Act (1950) in the Reclaimed Areas, and in the Newly Liberated Areas, North Korea enacted a land surveying project (March-June 1951) as an extension of the 1950 summer land reforms.⁵

Fourth, there were legal contradictions and clashes in this process in both North and South Korea. More precisely, it was a question of whether the new systems would recognize the ownership relations formed by the land reform/agricultural land reform which had taken place under the prior regimes. This question was linked to perceptions and revisions of each state's sovereignty and

details of their legislation.

The Rhee Syngman regime in South Korea did not recognize the land reform which had been enacted under North Korean rule in 1946, and attempted to carry out the effects of the 1950 Agricultural Land Reform Act in the Reclaimed Areas. Initially, however, there had been no specific mention or stipulations of North Korean regions included in this legislation. Owing to this, there was much consternation within government ministries concerning whether or not the Act could be applied to the Reclaimed Areas. Ultimately, the Act was implemented, meaning a reorganization of land ownership relations in the Reclaimed Areas. This took place in April 1958, three years after the transference of administrative authority of the region (Hahn 2012, 122-32).⁶

As to be expected, North Korea did not recognize the farmland reform that had been legislated by South Korea in 1950. However, there was a striking difference when compared with the case of South Korea. This difference came in the form of distinct legislation regarding land reform of the South Korean region: “Decision on the Organization of the Legislative Foundation Committee for the Purpose of Land Reform of the Southern Half of the Republic” (Cabinet Decision May 9, 1949) and “Regarding the Implementation of Land Reform on Regions in the Southern Half of the Republic” (Order of the Presidium, July 4, 1950). These were prepared separately from the Land Reform Act regarding North Korean territory in 1946. In addition, these laws, though only partially, recognized the results of the farmland reform.⁷ Moreover, because the Newly Liberated Areas were regions which had already once been affected by North Korea’s land reform system in July of 1950 (*Haebang Ilbo* 1950), the land survey program (March-June 1951) was carried out as a manner of reformulating and supplementing previous reforms.

Fifth, in both regions, farmland reform and the land survey project were carried out with a focus on “ownerless land.” In the Reclaimed Areas, those who considered themselves caretakers of absentee-landowner farmland took such farmland to be their own, and remaining absentee-landowner farmland came into the possession of the state, after which it was redistributed to farmers at a cost (Hahn 2017, 323-26, 333-39). In the Newly Liberated Areas, ownership over land that could be verified was recognized, while absentee-landowners’ land became the possession of the state, which then distributed the right to cultivate the land at no cost to farmers (South Yeonbaek People’s Committee 1951a; *Kaesong Sinmun* 1953b, 1953d, 1953e).

Sixth, the farmland reform in the Reclaimed Areas and the land survey project in the Newly Liberated Areas were influential in the development of South Korea’s capitalist and North Korea’s socialist economic systems. The most basic nature of the farmland reform that took place in the Reclaimed Areas was that it made land(owners) into business capital(ists) through the paid purchase (compensation) of owned land and the paid distribution (repayment) to farmers,

thereby transforming sharecropping into independently owned farming, ultimately in pursuit of capitalism. Yet beyond the perception and system of centering ownership, it was difficult to create capitalists, and South Korea was left with only petty farmers. Moreover, the ceasefire magnified farmland shortages, thus making the effects of farmland reform even more tepid.

As for the Newly Liberated Areas, North Korea's decision to distribute only cultivation rights and not ownership rights, including the right to sell land, operated effectively in the mid- to long-term move towards agricultural collectivization (socialist agriculture economic system). At the same time, North Korea recognized ownership of land and commerce in cases where the owner was verifiable, and utilized them for post-war restoration. This was made possible because North Korea's economic system at the time maintained a people's democratic economic system in which diverse notions of ownership were recognized. This has important implications for our topic. In particular, it is worth highlighting the fact that recognizing the old system did not contradict the introduction of the new North Korean system in the Newly Liberated Areas, but in fact the old system had been advantageous in the refinement of the new system. This is due to the fact that North Korean society, at the time, used a democratic peoples' economic system, not a socialist one, and was thus relatively flexible, and was also made possible because North Korea actively recognized and utilized the existing system. As such, it would not be an overstatement to claim that recognition and utilization of the old system is dependent on whether or not the new system has the adaptability to encompass and embrace the old system.

However, just as North Korea transitioned to a socialist system, so too did the economic structure of the Newly Liberated Areas also undergo a transformation. Policies which had acknowledged, used, and encouraged personal ownership of land and commerce gradually gave way to policies which encouraged production cooperatives and state-run enterprises, with an intense push for agricultural collectivization. Such a push for collectivization by North Korea invited backlash in the Newly Liberated Areas and their surrounding areas, which North Korea suppressed, by associating the backlash with political struggle, class struggle, and ideological struggle, and accelerated the push for collectivization (Kim 2000, 307-09; Seo 2005, 575-78).

The Transition to Nation/People and the Paradoxes of Conformity

The Korean War simultaneously created the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas and transformed the population and composition of residents in each region. Populations rapidly dwindled in each area, and the proportion of women and outsiders increased.

First, both regions went through a notable plummet in population size,

so much so that saying they were completely empty is not necessarily an exaggeration. There were nearly 120,000 households in the Reclaimed Areas just before Korea gained independence from Japan (1944), with around 110,000 households directly following independence (1946), but just following the Korean War (November 1954) only 36,000 households remained. The population similarly dropped from around 645,000 in 1944 to close to 598,000 in 1946, then plunging to around 177,000 in 1954 (Governor-General of Korea 1944; People's Committee of North Korea Planning Department 1947; Gangwon Province 1955; *Donga Ilbo* 1955). The number of households and the size of the population made up only 30 percent and 27.6 percent of the figures from before liberation, respectively. While it is difficult to confirm the figures regarding population changes in the Newly Liberated Areas, the fact that the North Korean authorities at the time reported that 50 to 70 percent of Kaesong's population had fled south shows that clearly there was a dramatic decrease in population (Ri 1954, 95).

Secondly, the population that had evacuated these areas were largely men, thus the proportion of women rose in these areas. "A considerable number of those who were heads of families (*hoju*) or could move about independently" (Song 2000, 117) either moved south or fled north, both in the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas. Those left behind in these regions were largely the women, sons, and elderly that made up the families of those who departed. A tower memorializing the recapture of Sokcho illustrates this situation well, with a statue of a mother and son adorning the top of the tower. Moreover, the reconstruction of the Newly Liberated Areas was carried out via the mobilization and utilization of women's labor as a stand-in for the lacking male workforce. The women left in the Newly Liberated Areas can be largely categorized as either family of men who fled south or family left behind by volunteer soldiers, and those who belonged to the former category had to show up and help with the reconstruction in order to recover their "honor" and raise their children, while those belonging to the latter group "honorably" mobilized to lead their local communities.

Third, it is notable that the proportion of outsiders increased in the makeup of residents of these areas. As for the Reclaimed Areas, natives constituted 45.3 percent of the population, while outsiders made up the remaining 54.7 percent (Yun 1968, 26). The composition of residents in the two regions became extremely complicated. This became the basis for conflict and discrimination within the regions as well.⁸ Especially when we consider the fact that traditionally, villages in Korea had a low proportion of outsiders, and were mostly clan villages made up of those with the same family name or status, we can see clearly how much of a shock the Korean War would have had on these regions.

Moreover, residents of these two regions underwent repeated instances of occupying/being occupied and experienced atrocities throughout the war. In this process, these people suffered countless wounds, even acquiring their own

methods for coping with these experiences. Consequently, the aspects, outcomes, and characteristics of the transition to nation or people that the residents of these regions went through could not help but change according to the perceptions and policies of North and South Korea as the principal agents of incorporation, the perceptions and responses of the local residents to these policies, as well as the native characteristics of the region or changes in its state of affairs.

North and South Korea's perception of the residents of the Newly Liberated Areas and the Reclaimed Areas, as well as their policies towards these residents, were two-sided. While claiming to have freed residents from exploitation, the state relentlessly questioned them, and while granting numerous rights to them, the state also systematically discriminated against them.

Both North and South Korea claimed the conversion from the prior system into their own "superior" system was a "liberation." South Korea saw the residents of the Reclaimed Areas as having finally been liberated from the "exploitation under red tyranny" (*Donga Ilbo* 1954). Whereas North Korea viewed the residents of the Newly Liberated Areas as having been oppressed under Japanese Imperialism, but also after liberation, having been "groaning under the imposition of unfair taxation, and subject to myriad forms of oppression under the rule of the U.S. imperial invaders and their puppet Rhee Syngman." North Korea claimed that people who had suffered such oppression had been granted land, a democratic system of taxation, and an authentic self-government, along with all sorts of considerations and benefits, and thus had been liberated (*Kaesong Sinmun* 1952a; Cho 1954).

Neither North nor South Korea wasted a moment when it came to integrating the residents of the two regions into the nation (*kukmin*) or the people (*inmin*). An example of this can be found in granting them the status of denizens, which shared the duties and the rights of the nation and the people. Residents of the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas paid taxes and were obligated to serve in the military. Additionally, starting with the 1956 Presidential Election and the 1958 National Assembly Election, residents of the Reclaimed Areas were able to exercise the right to vote.⁹ Residents of the Newly Liberated Areas exercised their right to vote in the 1956 People's Committee Election. Both North and South Korea declared their own elections as being true democratic elections.

However, neither North nor South Korea had entirely set aside their suspicion and distrust of the residents in these regions. South Korea's National Assembly viewed residents of the Reclaimed Areas as "having received communist education for six years and thus the communist ideology has infiltrated their minds," and stressed countermeasures for the infiltration of communist operatives and communist ideology (National Assembly of the Republic of Korea 1954). Similarly, North Korea perceived residents of the Newly Liberated Areas as distrustful of North Korean state authority "having received anticommunist propaganda and education." A North Korean state saw the need for a political

education program as it argued that the residents “were thick with the vestiges of Japanese Imperialism and feudal ideology” and “possessing low levels of class consciousness” (Ri 1954, 91; Presidium of the Politburo of the Korean Workers’ Party 1953, 742-44). We can see that both North and South Korea exhibited a two-faced disposition towards residents of the two areas; residents were seen as both *liberated after having been oppressed and exploited* and *necessary to suspect and control, requiring ideological education*. Moreover, due to their proximity to the ceasefire line—that is, their geographical proximity to their old regimes—each time an invasion of spies occurred, the local residents of these two areas were the primary suspects.

Among these residents as well, people were separated and discriminated against if family members had defected either North or South during the War. In the Reclaimed Areas, families which had had defected North suffered under the guilt by association system. As for the North, at first neither the civil rights nor property rights of those who had defected South, nor their families, were recognized, but gradually these groups became even further separated based on the degree to which they had voluntarily defected South or had been forced to, as well as the degree to which they had participated in anticommunist security forces during the war. The families of those who had defected South were also subject to differential policies based on these conditions (Hahn 2016, 401-07). In reality, the defection North or South by residents in the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas, as well as the problems of families which had remained, were matters largely determined by the movement of the demarcation line, and thus were not something particularly cut and dry for judging, yet measures which one may call a guilt by association system were instigated nonetheless.

A program for the enlightenment of public sentiment focused on anticommunist education was implemented in the Reclaimed Areas, and rank-and-file administrative organizations for the management and guidance of residents were established. The experiences of being North Korean *people* over the past five years were disavowed and residents were educated to support Rhee Syngman and the Liberal Party on the basis of anticommunism. Whereas in the Newly Liberated Areas, a political education program focused on the propagation of the superiority of the North Korean system, a new understanding of anti-Americanism and the motherland was put into place, and surveillance and control was reinforced with the operation of residents mutual surveillance organizations, among other organizations. Residents recanted their past five years of being South Korean *people* and were educated to support Kim Il Sung and the Workers’ Party.

Within such a system and environment, the lives and histories of residents in the two regions came to be considered their shortcomings. For being from “North Korean soil” and being “North Korean” the residents of the Reclaimed Areas were subject to distrust and discrimination, and thus they avoided terms

such as Reclaimed Areas or Reclaimed Area residents, and either severed their memories under North Korean rule or reformulated them. Only by doing so did the name Reclaimed Area come to feel unfamiliar and ultimately largely forgotten in Korean society.¹⁰

So too were the residents of the Newly Liberated Areas subject to anxiety and threats. Due to the purge of the Workers' Party of South Korea and various other anti-spy struggles and struggles with counterrevolutionary elements, in North Korea at the time there was a widespread atmosphere of avoiding contact with those originally from South Korea and this was in part due to the residents of the Newly Liberated Areas fundamentally being from South Korea and there being many families of those who had defected south located within this region (Lee and Choi 2003, 354-58). Because of this, a majority of residents of this region were forced to relentlessly surveil and mistrust one another and could not help but feel anxious and threatened by the possibility of their own punishment.

Yet in another sense, residents of the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas relegated their experiences under the old regimes as *exploitation* or their *darkest memories*, while forming a collective memory that their new system was superior to the old system. Within the Reclaimed Areas there were residents who had been former Workers' Party members, union members, and model citizens under North Korean rule, but they actively complied and contributed as citizens (*kukmin*) of the Republic of Korea, and members of their community. These residents turned blind eyes to each other's pasts—that is, their experiences of being *people* in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea—and moreover, by remembering and relating those experiences as ones of suffering, they had no choice but to turn blind eyes to one another's pasts. Furthermore, they were aware of how painful dredging up the past was for each other, and concluded that doing so would be of no help to their community or themselves.¹¹ Rather than the anti-Japanese imperialism, class-consciousness, and patriotism under North Korean rule, residents displayed their anti-communism, revealing, concocting, and exaggerating the details of their anti-communist experiences. By doing so, they were reborn as belonging to the nation of the Republic of Korea. Community leaders and residents of the Newly Liberated Areas remembered their lives as South Koreans before the war as ones of suffering and constructed a narrative of reflecting on their errors. Furthermore, they underscored the superiority of the North Korean system, considered their lives as the people of North Korea as being happy, and pledged their gratitude and loyalty to North Korean leadership (*Kaesong Sinmun* 1953a, 1953b, 1954a, 1954c). Such acts illustrate for us just how much hurt and suffering residents of these regions were subject to in the process of division, war, and the transplantation of an opposing regime. This is the paradox of the conformity and silence of the residents of these regions.

Closing Words: Implications for Reunification and Peace

Thus far I have examined the processes of South Korea's incorporation of the Reclaimed Areas and North Korea's incorporation of the Newly Liberated Areas in addition to their significance. To briefly compare and summarize the two, first, both the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas were regions born out of military occupation amidst the ongoing Korean War. The noteworthy difference between the two was whether or not the occupying forces in each region began governance immediately. While North Korea both occupied and began governing the regions corresponding to the Newly Liberated Areas simultaneously, South Korea's ability to govern the Reclaimed Areas was restricted. Having to first go through the process of establishing a military government by the UNC, governance over the Reclaimed Areas was relinquished to South Korea only long after a year had passed since the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement.

Secondly, the transformation of political regimes in both the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas were carried out at a break-neck speed. This was because through the process of being occupied, having their occupiers retreat, and being won back by their original governors, each of these regions (as well as the people who resided within them) had prior experience of the opposing regime. In addition, once they faced occupation and anticipated their incorporation by the opposing new regime, the existing political organizations and their respective members would "disappear," thus leaving behind only organizations and members who were supportive of the new regime. In this manner, the transplantation of political systems took place following a preliminary "voluntary" transition within the community itself. By appointing figures from outside of these communities to the main managerial positions within the varied political organizations, as well as exploiting the resentment and negative experiences of the locals, the new governments were able to win over and control the local communities.

Third, in each of these regions, the transition of their economic systems progressed in a very complex manner. Land reform, in particular, was a critical agenda for reform directly connected to securing legitimacy for both the North and South Korean regimes. Land reform was one axis of the efforts to do away with the vestiges of Japanese colonialism in Korea, as well as being a necessary component for improving the socio-economic situation of Koreans, who were largely petty tenant farmers. Due to this, North Korea enacted land reform in 1946, while South Korea enacted farmland reform in the spring of 1950. However, land ownership relations became muddled as the peninsula was ravaged by war. Both North and South Korea were intent on reorganizing land ownership relations in the Newly Liberated Areas and Reclaimed Areas, respectively, but their approaches were characterized by a Cold War mindset. Neither regime did much to recognize the land ownership system that had been previously been

upheld by the opposite regime, and their primary focus was on transplanting their own system. As a result, the farmland reform carried out by South Korea in the Reclaimed Areas spurred distinct disputes between the residents of the region. At the same time, North Korea was oriented towards socialist land policy, but in instances where they could verify the rightful owner of a tract of land, that right of possession was acknowledged, and the land was forcefully restored to the owner and used for development.

Lastly, the transformation of the national identity of those who lived in each region took place in silence and conformity. While both North and South Korea told residents of the incorporated regions that they had “liberated them from exploitation,” they were continuously suspicious of locals, and while they systematically granted locals numerous rights, they still discriminated against them. Due to this two-sided recognition and discrimination, residents of the Reclaimed Areas and Newly Liberated Areas considered their own history and lives as their “weaknesses.” Residents catalogued their experiences under the old regime as “exploitation” or “their dark pasts” and have formulated a collective memory that the new regime is superior to the old. Their silence and conformity to the new regime paradoxically illustrates the suffering and scars they underwent in the process of division and war, as well incorporation by the countering regime.

The experiences of the Newly Liberated Areas and the Reclaimed Areas exemplify in a very practical manner what types of outcomes we can expect when unification is pursued by route of one system unilaterally incorporating the other by means of war and occupation. More importantly, their stories clarify for us to the importance of systematic and detailed preparation for integration and transition between two, mutually respecting systems.

First, the reunification of North and South Korea must be a process of creating a new peaceful system. But the process of creating a new system begins with our perspectives on and attitudes towards the currently existing system. In the case of the Newly Liberated Areas and the Reclaimed Areas, though it came to fruition with a very Cold War-characterized understanding and attitude of disavowal and removal of the old system, our new, future system must begin with an in-depth understanding and broad recognition of the old system. Such a broad recognition and embrace of the old system will minimize the chaos and conflict surrounding the process of creating a new system, as well as play a vital role in creating a peaceful yet constructive society.

Secondly, reunification is a process of North and South Korean systems facing one another and changing. The object of transformation is not only our counterpart, but ourselves as well. Despite this, we often find ourselves thinking of reunification taking place as a result of a sudden change like the collapse of North Korea or a gradual shift in North Korea by means of the Sunshine Policy; that is to say, we often think of the change only occurring on the part of North Korea.

But any change that befalls North Korea is certain to have a profound impact on South Korea as well. When we study the experiences of the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas, we can clearly see that such a change will not only occur on one side, but will implicate both North and South Korea. Furthermore, changes in the political environment such as the recent improvements in U.S.-North Korea relations and discussions of signing a peace treaty require a complete overturn of South Korea's existing perceptions, regulations, laws, and constitution regarding North Korea. Thus, we must ask ourselves more sincerely about the possibility of change in South Korea, what it would look like, and what it would aim to achieve.

Third, the progression of reunification and peace will occur on multiple layers, in a complex fashion. The experiences of the Reclaimed Areas and the Newly Liberated Areas demonstrate just how multi-layered and complex the problem of the Korean Peninsula's division is. We cannot simply consider the history of this area through the lens of inter-Korean relations or from a democratic viewpoint; its development came with the complex interlaying of the international level, the level of inter-Korean relations, and the levels of the state, the region, and the people of both North and South Korea. Reunification is both the process and the outcome of untying the knots on these three layers. Just as when we unravel a complex knot, we must not only understand the whole, but the intricately tangled structure and work to loosen it, and we must slowly, carefully extract every loop and thread so as not to damage them, so too are reunification and peace both processes and outcomes.

Fourth, reunification and peace are issues of life and survival for each and every individual on the Korean Peninsula. Though there are cases of residents in the Newly Liberated Areas and the Reclaimed Areas whose lives were the result of voluntary choice, for the most part, residents' lives played out on the battlefield of Cold War international relations and inter-Korean relations and came with undeniable problems. When these residents, the nation/people of two antagonistic political camps, were occupied after being both directly and indirectly implicated—both as aggressor and victim—in the atrocities carried out by both sides during the war, they were given only a forced choice. The lives of those living in these regions were filled with tireless efforts to survive and adapt, in addition to being full of conflict and hurt. When we speak of reunification and peace, we must also take into careful consideration how the process will transform and affect the lives of residents.

Finally, a grand conception of what type of society we will create in the wake of North-South reunification is necessary. As we can see in even the names of the Newly Liberated Areas and the Reclaimed Areas, these regions experienced the transplantation of a system in the name of liberation. Because the baseline understanding of the problem was that it could be fixed through simply implementing one's own "superior" system, there were no deeper considerations

on what new type of system they would create. As inter-Korean exchange and cooperation heat up on an unprecedented scale, the topography of not only the Korean Peninsula but East Asia at large will be transformed. Such change is of course a positive sign that allows us to have hope. But it is dangerous to flesh out the world that will rise out of such changes with only rose-tinted optimism. We must plan the blueprint for the image of the society we wish to create, and this can only begin with recognition of our counterpart's system, and considerations for the possibility of our own system changing, the multiple layers and complexity of the issue of division, the issues which affect individual residents, and more.

Endnotes

1. Thus far when discussing the process of reunification and its aftermath, the most referenced case is that of Germany. Western Germany's reunification efforts, as well as the economic burden which followed, in addition to Eastern Germany's positive, or perhaps negative, political, economic, and social changes have been highlighted as an example to learn from. For more on this, see D. Kim 2010; Yeom 2010; Lim and Lee 2010. Moreover, most research seeking answers regarding the possibility of regime change in North Korea has examined cases of post socialist countries in Eastern Europe and beyond. Though it is certainly true that we must keep in mind the examples of German reunification and regime change in countries across the world when preparing for Korean reunification, it is just as vital for us to look to the historical cases which have taken place here on the peninsula itself. Once sufficient research on foreign instances of regime change and the experiences of North and South Korea, as well as comparative research between these two fields, has been carried out, the possibility of change on the Korean Peninsula in the future will be far more conceivable.

2. "Military occupation," as defined by international law at the time, distinguished between military occupation and civilian-led administration (Hague Convention [IV] respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex, 1907). Occupying forces' acts of governing the people of occupied territories were not directly linked to military occupation. The occupying power and administrative actors were distinguished from one another, and the sovereign government of the occupied territory was recognized as the principal agent of such a region's administration. However, occupation of their counterpart's territory practiced by both North and South Korea had an unusual significance; both the government of the Republic of Korea and that of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were asserting their own legitimacy and criticizing the other as being a "puppet" state. Occupation of their counterpart's land was regarded precisely as recovering their own territory.

3. Though the first constitution of Korea, established in 1948, asserted that "The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean Peninsula and its adjacent islands," neither the UN nor the United States acknowledged the sovereignty of the Republic of Korea as extending to regions north of the 38th parallel. Though the December 12, 1948 UN Resolution acknowledged the legality of the establishment of the government of the Republic of Korea in the area south of the 38th parallel, they specified that the task of

establishing a unified Korean government had not been fulfilled (United Nations General Assembly 1948). When, in October of 1950, South Korean and UN troops occupied North Korean areas, the United Nations Commission on Korea (UNCOK) advised that the “responsibility for the entirety of governance and civil administration” of the North Korean region be “temporarily taken over by the Unified Command.” With their right as the executive agent of the Unified Command, the United States delivered the “Occupation Directive for North Korea” to MacArthur, who was commander of the UNC. And the same happened in the Reclaimed Areas.

4. At the time of the National Assembly elections in 1958, the Reclaimed Areas were noted as a place for both well-known and unknown figures from other areas to run for office. In fact, former President Kim Daejung, who was a newcomer to politics at the time, stated that he would “Pioneer the reclamation of the bastion of the Liberal Party in the Reclaimed Areas,” and ran for office in Inje County, Gangwon Province, located within the Reclaimed Areas, where he was first elected to the National Assembly.

5. For more on land reforms in the Newly Liberated Areas and the development of the land survey project, see Hahn 2015, 251-53.

6. The government decided to structure land ownership relations by applying the Agricultural Land Act (enacted 1949, revised 1950), leading up to the proclamation of Presidential Decree 1360 “Enforcement Decree of Agricultural Land Reform in Reclaimed Areas” in April 1958.

7. North Korea’s land reform legislation regarding South Korean regions took into consideration the shifts in ownership relations due to the disposal of farmland by the New Korea Company during USAMGIK rule, the sale of farmland belonging to landowners, as well as the redistribution that accompanied farmland reform. In cases where even a modicum of a price was paid for land, it was recognized as the possession of the farmer.

8. Multiple forms of conflict arose between locals and outsiders. In the case of the Reclaimed Areas, naturally a hierarchy was established between the military authorities and residents, and when the time came for National Assembly elections, conflicts between locals and outsiders over which candidate to support came to the surface. People also came into conflict over issues regarding land ownership rights and cultivation rights.

9. However, the system of local self-government which was implemented in the 1950s in South Korea was not applied to the Reclaimed Areas. As discussed earlier in the article, the government which had interpreted the constitutional clause relating territory as enabling the implementation of the Agricultural Land Reform Act had, in the end, been of the persuasion that for many reasons the system of local self-government could not be applied to the Reclaimed Areas.

10. Residents of the Reclaimed Areas began calling their region the Reclaimed Areas in the 2000s. The author conducted a field study of the area at the time and conducted face to face interviews with residents. During the course of such interviews, the residents, who tried as much as possible not to disclose much about the history of the Reclaimed Areas and their own lives, understood that they could connect the history of their region with the tourism, culture, and development of their community, after which they began to actively unearth subject matters related to the Reclaimed Areas. This change was made possible by the improvement in inter-Korean relations at the time, in addition to an atmosphere of easing of Cold War-era perceptions and policies in South Korean society.

11. This is both part of their collective wisdom after having endured the pain and

suffering of division and war, and the resultant regime change which was difficult for them to completely parse, as well as a method of the peace that they describe. This tells us that we must pay attention to the compliance and silence of the residents of these areas.

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Monica Hahn is an assistant professor at the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University. Her research deals with the issues of division and unification of North and South Korea, with a focus on the history of the Korean War and the border region between North and South Korea. She methodically researches Reclaimed Areas, Newly Liberated Areas, the history of the DMZ, and the state of non-peace which has remained since the Korean War. Her published works include her monograph *The Korean War and Reclaimed Areas* (Pureun Yeoksa, 2017), co-authored anthologies such as *North and South Korean Occupation Policies During the Korean War and the Legacies of the Korean War* (2014) and *Beyond Historical Understanding and Reasoning on Division* (2019), as well as her articles, "The Process and Background of the DMZ's Militarization in the 1960s," "UNC Regulations and UNC Management of the Korean Demilitarized Zone." Email: mnc92@snu.ac.kr.

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