



MENDING WALL?

The War over History in South Korea

This article comes at a particularly difficult time for the Republic of Korea (South Korea), and its relations with the United States of America, the People's Republic of China (China), and Japan. Time and again, North Korea has threatened to make South Korea "a sea of fire" and to launch its nuclear warheads not only toward Japan and Guam but also to cities all over the US. US President Donald Trump has made it clear to the government of North Korea that it will not tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea, whether aimed at the US itself or at its allies, including South Korea, and will obliterate the country, if necessary, to defend itself and its allies. China, whose relationship with North Korea is oftentimes described by the Chinese as "lips and teeth," meaning the teeth get cold without lips, declares that it opposes the use of force and nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula. South Korea, an ally of the US for two-thirds of a century, is siding with China and does not want to participate in the combined military exercise with the US and Japan or join the US plan to surround China together with Japan and India. Readers might wonder about the presence of the US on the Korean peninsula and even why the US has been so involved in both defending South Korea and demonizing the North Korean regime. They might also wonder why the current government of South Korea is attempting to move away from the US and get closer to China. The simple answer is that it all began during the height of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United

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States and things have changed since its end, but the history is far deeper and more complex.

The title of this article is from Robert Frost's well known eponymous poem. The narrator of the poem meets with his neighbor every spring to repair any damages to the stone wall that runs between their properties. He sees no reason to keep the wall between them, though, and suggests as much. His neighbor remains unconvinced and just repeats, "Good fences make good neighbors." In his mind, the narrator scorns his neighbor, who he thinks resembles "an old-stone savage armed." What is interesting in the poem is the fact that the narrator's behavior contradicts his rhetoric. Frost's poem pokes fun at the contradictory mind of the narrator who ridicules his neighbor who believes in the wall, while at the same time he keeps mending the wall and maintaining it every year. Frost seems to say that the narrator is no different from his neighbor—i.e. he himself is an old-stone savage armed, but one perhaps more snobbish than his neighbor, and shows the ironic coexistence of the impulse in his mind to both build and break the wall.

By taking Frost's poem primarily as a satire of the narrator's complex mind on the wall, and taking mending to mean both restoring or strengthening and lowering or eliminating, in the initial proposal of this article, I wanted to examine the physical wall in the Korean peninsula that divides it into North and South. I planned to look into the recent attempts at mending the wall: symbolic acts performed along the wall, for example, Women Cross DMZ (the demilitarized zone, which is the 4 km wide strip of land stretching 250 km along the wall), and innovative plans to make this land into a peace park as a symbol of ideological reconciliation and ecological paradise, with hotels, casinos, and facilities that would provide visitors entertainment and pleasure. I also wanted to examine the impact of the wall's presence on South Koreans around the sentiment of *han*, a Korean word loosely defined as frustration, anger, and sadness, something that has been shaped by centuries of suffering from wars, invasions, colonization, injustice and exploitation by dominant people at home, because in the mind of a significant number of Koreans, the zone is still inscribed as a wall permanently bisecting the peninsula not only physically but also culturally.



The Fence by the DMZ Train 49 from Seoul Station to Dorasan Station. Photo by Jeon Han, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism Korean Culture and Information. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Korea_DMZ_Train_49_(14246308552).jpg

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The development of events in South Korea since I sent the abstract have made me realize that the wall between North and South Korea is as strong as ever, even insurmountable. This is not really a surprise; many South Koreans, I believe, knew it all the while. The South and the North have been in a struggle with life and death at stake for the past seventy years. Few Koreans, both in the South and North, believe that they could co-exist with their respective systems intact. Eventually, one would absorb the other either by force or by relatively peaceful means. What is newly disturbing is the wall that is rising between Koreans in the South. It seemed much higher and stronger than I had imagined, with no possibility of lowering it, or mending the divide. For conservatives in South Korea, the past seventy years are the proud history of success. South Korea has achieved both industrialization and democratization at a pace and scale that is unprecedented. South Korean progressives do not agree. To them, it is the history of failure and accumulated injustice to be purged now by the light of the candle revolution.¹ Both sides see

1. Coherent ideas and programs are hard to find that would distinguish conservatives and progressives in South Korea. There seems to be only one

the other as armed savages, if not from the Paleolithic era. It is not simply a political division between conservatives and progressives or between Right and Left. The struggle between North and South somehow metonymically underwrites every political battle within the South. It is the total power struggle for legitimacy in the writing of Korean history for the past hundred years and over what is and should be the Korean way of life. I'll focus on the war over history being waged in South Korea during the past several months, and the place of the US therein.

US PRESENCE IN SOUTH KOREA

Korea was not always a unified country in its territory, but until it was divided into North and South in 1945, it had maintained its territorial unity on the Korean peninsula for well over 1,000 years. There was talk between Japan and China in the late 16th century to divide and rule Korea between them, and the Secretary of State of the UK offered a similar idea to Russia and Japan before the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, but neither idea was realized. In 1945, two young US officers, Colonel Dean Rusk, who later became the Secretary of State under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and Charles Bonesteel, who served as commander of US Forces in Korea, drew a line along the 38th parallel merely for military convenience, using a map from *National Geographic* magazine, because no better map was available. Neither colonel knew much about Korea and just thought if they could divide the country along the 38th parallel, Seoul would belong to the South. When to their surprise the Soviet Union accepted that division, only a few could have predicted that the division would have lasted for the next several decades. No one then seemed to have thought it would develop into the most heavily militarized zone only several years later after the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. The buffer zone, which is ironically called the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ),

meaningful line dividing them: their attitude and practice toward North Korea. Progressives are more prone to understanding the North on its own terms, accommodating or following them, and accepting its legitimacy. I'll use the terms 'conservatives' and 'the Right,' or 'progressives' and 'the Left' in accordance with the context.

has become one of the most popular destinations for travelers visiting South Korea since the Berlin Wall was dismantled in 1989.



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The Korean railroad Donghae-bukbu line on the Korean DMZ, taken from the Goseong Tongil-Jeonmangdae (Unification Observatory), South Korea. commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donghae-bukbu_line_on_Korean_DMZ.JPG

The role of the US in the recent Korean history since the late 19th century is one of the core issues in a ferocious war over history in South Korea. The US has been involved in the Pacific since long before World War II. In 1882, the Korean-American Treaty was signed, and thereafter the first American minister arrived in Korea. The next year, the Korean government sent its first official delegates to Washington, DC. In the same year, articles on the US appeared in a Korean newspaper, and an English training school was set up to produce English interpreters. Kil-chun Yu, the first Korean student in the US, published his experience in *Observations on Travels in the West* (1895). Yu, who always thought China was the center of the world, was shocked at what he saw in the States. In the early 20th century, the wave of immigration started, and by 1905 seven thousand Korean workers were working at plantations in Hawai'i. In the same year, the US made a secret agreement with Japan. Japan could occupy Korea with the understanding and support by the US government in exchange

for Japan's acceptance of the US occupation of the Philippines. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US fought a long and hard war against the Empire of Japan in the 1940s, and the Korean peninsula was then part of the Empire of Japan. The US helped establish the Republic of Korea in 1948, after World War II and the defeat of the Empire of Japan. Of course, Koreans established their own independent country at the time, but it is widely thought that the US played a big part in establishing South Korea as a US-oriented, capitalist, and anti-Communist society in the period shortly after WWII.

The US government has long thought of South Korea as its ally, and has promoted this narrative. A partnership between the US and South Korea has been sought, even preferred, for years—both on the South Korean side and on the US side. The US was a major player on the then-new United Nations side of the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. Other countries fought, too, but the US government, US media, and US educational institutions promoted the Korean War as a US war against Communist North Korea. The United States has taken pride in South Korea's tremendous economic, political, and educational growth. Many in the US have been relieved at the significant reduction in US aid to South Korea as a result of South Korea's great economic growth. Only more recently, in the 1980s, the South Korean government became completely independent financially. Despite occasional strains on both sides, US presidents since the 1950s have continued to see South Korea as a great and important ally of the US. In fact, US President Trump made a point of visiting South Korea and speaking at its General Assembly as recently as November 2017, and his predecessor (and in many ways arch-enemy) Barack Obama called South Korea "one of America's closest allies and greatest friends" at the 2009 G20 summit in London. The US has also made a point of designating South Korea a major non-NATO ally. To support all of this, the US has long maintained a major military presence in South Korea and has been present both in the Demilitarized Zone just sixty kilometers north of Seoul, South Korea, the capital of the Republic of Korea, and in Seoul itself. The US for decades had a full-fledged military base right in Seoul.

Not surprisingly, then, there is in South Korea a very split view regarding the United States. In 2014, according to a BBC World

Service Poll, 58% of South Koreans said they viewed United States influence positively, while 28% said they viewed it negatively. In the same poll, 55% of people polled in the US said they viewed South Korea's influence positively, and 34% said they viewed it negatively. While there are some other countries in the world with polls showing regularly high positive views of the US (including, for example, Poland and Kenya), South Korea is, according to this poll, one of the most pro-US nations in the world.

Contrary to the BBC poll, Koreans' attitudes towards the US have become more complicated of late. The change may have something to do with a decline in interest in the US. If you had asked Koreans "Do you like the US?" in the 1960s or 1970s most of them would have answered in the positive without a moment's hesitation. Attitudes started to change in the early 1980s, and now it's almost meaningless to categorize Korean sentiment as either pro-American or anti-American. According to a recent study by a Korean sociologist, Hyun Song Lee, Koreans nowadays think that the US is very important to them, but this does not necessarily mean they like the US or trust the US. Koreans on average have favorable attitudes towards the US but their preference is only minimal. They evaluate the US highly in the areas of economy and technology, but not in politics or society or education. The younger and the more highly educated a Korean is, the less likely he or she is to speak favorably of the US or to trust it. More experience or knowledge of the US does not have a significant effect on their level of trust. In brief, for most Koreans, Lee concludes, the US is an important country for Koreans' economy and security, but their feelings are almost neutral and they do not particularly trust or distrust it. The US is no better or no worse than Korea as a state—with similar weaknesses and strengths, problems and potentials. Lee's study is not conclusive, with a very limited number of questions and sample size, but its conclusion is suggestive of the changes detectable in Koreans' perception of the US. The democratization of Korean society, expansion and progress in the Korean economy, conflicts of interests in the process, historical experience with the US from the 19th century—these are the main factors that have brought about such changes in Koreans opinions of the US.

The Korean War was brutal and fiercely fought. More than 600,000 South and North Korean soldiers were killed or went missing in action. It is estimated that more than 1.6 million civilians died. The total population of Korea at the time was 25 million (with 16 million in the South and 9 million in the North). American casualties were over 50,000, while Chinese casualties were estimated to have reached 600,000. As shown in the classified documents from Russia released after the dismantling of the Soviet Union, Kim Il-Sung, the leader of North Korea, invaded the South with approval and support from Stalin and Mao. The War was a tragedy, but some Koreans now want to believe that from that tragedy has emerged the great narrative of Korea. The narrative goes something like this. Koreans, awakened from the illusion of socialism, came to realize the value of freedom, escaped from the fetters and bondage of premodernity out of which most countries were liberated after World War II, and marched toward the road of liberal democracy and market economy. Out of poverty and tragedy, South Korea has become one of the great economic powers. Its people have made the most dramatic economic achievements and now live all over the world. Those who deny this fact are deceiving themselves and suffering from the collective depression.

From this perspective, the Korean War set the foundation for great success. It completed the demographic revolution which had started in the Japanese occupation, disrupting a strict class system of a few aristocrats, a majority of commoners, and a significant number of slaves. In the chaos and maelstrom of the war, survival, not class, was all that counted. The war also put an end to the social unrest and instability that South Korea had suffered for five years before the war when South Koreans were divided between Right and Left and fiercely fought in a series of acts of terror, riots, revolts, and uprisings. During the war, both South and North Koreans could move to the part of the country where they wanted to live. Some hundred thousand South Koreans, mostly socialists, idealists, and daydreamers opted for the North. South Korea became ideologically unified against socialism and Communism until the 1980s when a new generation of Leftist activists and students emerged against the military dictatorship.

*Walls,
Material and Rhetorical:
Past, Present,
and Future*

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In addition, it spurred some 1.5 million Koreans to migrate from North to South, many of whom were Christians, were educated, owned property, and later became leaders in the South Korean army, business, and politics. Their migration was a brain drain for North Korea. The increase in the population catalyzed the drastic urbanization and industrialization of South Korea. In 1945, only 15% of Koreans lived in the city. Now, 90% do. The war also gave birth to a new elite group, the military, which learned the most advanced management and administration skills and a rational approach to combat and order from the American military which trained and educated it. Led by Chung-hee Park, then Major General, the military eventually seized political power through the military revolution in 1961. Park and his followers played a crucial role in modernizing South Korea, together with adventurous and patriotic entrepreneurs, competent bureaucrats, and hard-working Koreans. Equipped with a competitive spirit, especially against North Korea, which at that time was much better off than the South, and rivalry with and jealousy of Japan, they drove the country into modernization, concentrating on the development of heavy and chemical industry. At the time, this project seemed suicidal, but is now called the Miracle on the Han River. From a global historical perspective, the Korean War stopped the global advance of communism from eastern Europe, through the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea since World War II. The economic miracle and subsequent democratization of South Korea provide the living evidence of the victory of liberal democracy and free market systems over the communism.

An increasing number of Koreans takes pride in the fact that Korea is one of only two countries in the world (the other being Japan) that, since World War II, have achieved both industrialization and democratization. Its economy is the 13th largest in the world, and its GDP per capita is around US \$30,000 today. This is an astounding achievement, considering that in the mid-1950s half of the Korean government's budget came from US aid, and that the GDP per capita was far less than \$100 in 1960, much lower than those of the Philippines, Malaysia, Ethiopia, and North Korea, to name only a few. Moreover, if unified, many Koreans believe their country will be as powerful as Germany, France, and the UK.

If united, its population size would be equal to Germany, its physical size similar to the UK, and its economy would be almost identical in size to that of France. The country has been on the right track to more mature democracy until the recent events surrounding the impeachment of the president. It remains to be seen whether the impeachment will turn out to be a significant setback, an irrevocable disaster, or a stumbling block on the way to more advanced democracy.

This is a narrative many conservative Koreans have constructed and cherished for the past 10 or 20 years. Central in this narrative are achievements made by Syngman Rhee, the first South Korean president (1948–1960), and Chung-hee Park, an authoritarian dictator and revolutionary who ruled the country with an iron fist from 1961 through 1979. Born in 1875, Rhee was imprisoned for over five years for his involvement in an attempt to dethrone the Korean emperor before he moved to the US in 1905. He was educated at Georgetown (BA 1907), Harvard (MA 1908), and Princeton (Ph.D 1910) where his supervisor was Woodrow Wilson. Staying in the US, Rhee tried to help liberate Korea by means of diplomacy, believing that its liberation would be possible only with the agreement by the powers surrounding the Korean peninsula just like the annexation of Korea into Japan in 1910.² Rhee became widely known in the US diplomatic circle, particularly for the prediction he published before the Pearl Harbor attack occurred in his book *Japan Inside Out* (1941) that Japan would attack the US. He returned to South Korea in 1945 and was elected President three years later. He was a shrewd politician, called General McArthur a son, and President Nixon in his memoir recalls his meeting with Rhee over several pages. The vice president of the Eisenhower administration wrote that he learned a valuable lesson from this old politician of a small country about how to deal with a communist.

Among other things, Rhee educated Koreans about freedom, democracy, and individualism, of which Koreans had no idea when they were liberated in 1945. One Korean historian, Younghoon

2. Japan succeeded in colonizing Korea by means of diplomacy and war. It obtained approvals from the US and UK in exchange for its approval of their respective privileges in the Philippines and India; and it won wars against China and Russia which had territorial ambitions in the Korean peninsula.

Rhee, considers Rhee's contribution to South Korean society equivalent to the Copernican revolution, for in the late 1940s three quarters of South Koreans preferred socialism. Rhee also persuaded the reluctant US to sign an alliance treaty with South Korea in 1953 after the Korean War. The assistance provided by the US has been essential for the development of South Korea since then. Rhee also paved the way for South Korea's economic and technological developments. President Rhee was not pro-US but knew how to deal with the US government. His contributions to South Korea overshadow his wrongdoings and mistakes.

President Park, once a Japanese military officer who graduated from the Imperial Japanese Army Academy, then a suspected Communist party member sentenced in the late 1940s to life imprisonment, survived thanks to his naming names of the Communists in the Korean Army, help from his superiors in the army, and the outbreak of the Korean War. He was promoted to Major General, becoming the deputy commander-in-chief of the 2nd Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, and seized power through the military revolution in 1961. He is said to have made maximum achievements on behalf of his country with minimum sacrifice during the shortest period of time. Under his administration, Koreans emerged from poverty for the first time in thousands of years. His leadership was unprecedented in the history of underdeveloped countries and without it, the economic development of South Korea is believed to have been simply impossible. For 18 years under his administration, the annual rate of economic development was approaching 9%, whereas the per capita income increased from \$82 in 1961 to \$1,660 in 1980. Park's frugal way of life still moves South Koreans. He used a fan instead of an air conditioner at the Blue House to save energy and asked his wife to mend his clothes. The doctor, who examined him right after he was shot in 1979, could not believe his eyes because the president was wearing a worn out wrist watch and belt. Bricks were found after his death in the water tank of the toilets at his residence for saving water.

But more important than the economic achievements under Park was the awakening of the national spirit from a long slumber of defeatism, resignation, and hopelessness, especially through

Park's New Village Movement, the ethos of which was "we can do it" and which a number of developing countries still try to emulate. His determination and leadership helped South Korea reach the threshold of advanced nationhood. Believing that a certain level of economic abundance is a necessary condition for democracy, he helped modernize the country. In the face of criticism and opposition to his dictatorial style of leadership, he maintained that dictatorship was sometimes necessary for efficient development. He is known to have said "Spit on my grave!", meaning he would do whatever was good for the country and leave the judgement of him to history. He knew how to inspire people and get things done. In brief, Park was a hero.

THE LEFT'S NARRATIVE OF PROTEST AND PURGE

The South Korean Left is opposed to this narrative in every detail. The history of South Korea since 1945 is a history of injustice and exploitation. South Korea did not purify the remnants of the imperialist Japanese rule. The descendants of the collaborators with Japan still benefit from their ancestors' treacherous activities, occupying the leadership positions in Korean society. President Park's service as an officer in the Japanese Army before rising to power is evidence of this. Basic human rights were violated by President Rhee and the military regime later. Its economic achievements would have been achieved in a more just and egalitarian fashion under democratic leadership. The so-called miracle on the Han River was accomplished by the sacrifice of hard-working blue-collar laborers. The fruits of economic growth have not been shared. The descendants of the collaborators of the Japanese colonial rule, big business, and corrupt politicians have monopolized them. South Korea belongs to the lowest echelon in the world in terms of equality between poor and rich. In brief, the history of South Korea is one of shame and disgrace.

The legitimacy of Korean history lies in North Korea. Its leader Kim Il-sung fought for Korea's independence against the Japanese army during the colonized era, whereas President Rhee divided the independence movement and his diplomatic efforts were dubious at best. The North has maintained its national pride and dignity despite pressures from the Soviet Union and China

whereas South Korea was something of a US colony. Moreover, it has maintained its national integrity with the *juche* idea—the idea of political independence, economic self-reliance, and self-defense—which forms the foundation of the North. Its difficulties are mostly caused by the anti-North Korea policies of the US.

The Korean War in this narrative is not a war of invasion by the North nor a defensive war on the part of the South with the assistance of the UN troops of sixteen countries. It was a civil war, as President Moon Jae-in claimed in his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2017. Thus both South and North Korea are responsible for the war, and the intervention of the UN with the leadership of the US is not justified. Often, the war is presented as a proxy war in the Cold War era. Korea, both South and North, was a sacrificial lamb in the struggle of the neighboring powers with the US, the strongest axis of evil. Thus it is the US which is responsible for the war. It was not the Korean War but the American War in Korea, just like the American War in Afghanistan or Iraq.

President Rhee is held responsible for the current state of the country—the division between North and South. Out of his greed for power he maneuvered to establish a single government below the 38th parallel, repressing those who tried to set up a unified government of North and South. He also revised the Constitution again and again so that he could be president until he died. Under his leadership, democracy in South Korea regressed for several decades. This narrative highlights the fact that his presidency ended after twelve years when he resigned and went into exile in Hawaii in 1960. In addition, he made no effort to purge pro-Japanese collaborators who he hired as high-ranking government officials. Their descendants, in turn, have unjustly constituted the dominant class in Korean society. The Left dates the beginning of the Republic of Korea to 1919 when the provisional Korean government was established in Shanghai, China, while the conservatives believe, along with the United Nations, that the ROK was founded through the national Constitutional Assembly election of 1948.

As for President Chung-hee Park, he also dealt a fatal blow to Korean democracy with his coup d'état in 1961. His critics

on the Left were not impressed by his leadership. He was a former Japanese military officer with a Japanese name and, above all, a dictator, arresting dissidents without habeas corpus, torturing them, and putting them in jail. His economic policy helped a few large corporations prevail, in no small part through exploitation of the workers. These workers are hailed as the pillar of economic development, while any role Park, the entrepreneurs, and bureaucrats may have played is not acknowledged by the Left. His policy made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Its legacy made South Korea the most unequal country in the world today, as evidenced in the phrase now popular among the young, “Hell Chosun”—which means Korea is a hell.

The Left is dubious of Park’s reputation for living as a common man. They point out that Park was being served by two young women, a popular singer and model, at a party with his chief of staff, chief of guards and the director of the Korean CIA when he was shot by the director. Today, South Korea is a country where evil and greedy big business governs together with corrupt politicians and the political establishment. The accumulated evil should be purged and burned down by torches in the hands of the people. Modern Korean history should be written around the spirit of the independence movement’s struggle against Japanese rule, which is now realized again in the candlelight revolution in 2017.

NUCLEAR CRISIS, TRUMP, AND THE IMPEACHMENT OF PRESIDENT PARK

The escalating tension in the Korean peninsula further complicates views on the US. For the South Korean Right who take a realistic approach to international politics, the US, like China, Russia, and Japan, is a villain that imposes its will upon other countries either by talk or force whenever needed. But it at least maintains the appearance of a relationship between equals in its dealing with South Korea. More importantly, it is the only country that has no territorial ambition in the peninsula in East Asia. When President Truman decided to send troops to South Korea in 1950, his decision must primarily have been based on the considerations of the US interests rather than saving South Korean people; yet he could have decided differently. The Right believes that Koreans should appreciate his decision, without which South

Korea would have been under the rule of the Kim family, which is not really a Communist regime but a dynasty. The presence of the US Army in South Korea along with the alliance treaty between the two countries has guaranteed the security and stability of the peninsula, the foundation upon which South Korea has built its economic development. The Right understands that the US military bases were needed to protect US interests against the Soviet Union until its dismantlement and now, China. The bases are good for South Korea as well. Their presence helped lessen military spending on the part of the South Korean government and invite foreign investments without the risk of a war. Without the US presence, the Miracle on the Han River would have been impossible. Fortunately for South Koreans, the interests of both countries have been identical. In addition, freedom and democracy, values cherished by the US, are worthwhile to pursue, however illusory they may be. What values do the Chinese even attempt to realize, the South Korean Right often asks. They believe China has nothing except for the realization of the Chinese hegemony—that is what the Chinese Dream, as suggested by Xi Jinping recently, is all about, in rhetoric as well in practice.

The Right believes that South Korea should take sides with the winner in the struggle to become a hegemon between the US and China. If China has a better chance, South Korea should be an ally of China. But the Right thinks China has little chance. Talk of the rise of China was typical American hyperbole, verbalized by some American scholars, politicians, and journalists like similar discourse about Japan in the 1980s. The Right is upset about the pro-Chinese stance of the current South Korean regime which follows the Chinese policies of so-called double halts and double tracks: the simultaneous halt in the further development of nuclear weapons by North Korea and the combined military exercises by South Korea and the US; and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the peace treaty between the North and the US. From the Right's view, the aims of the current Korean government should be clear: the peace treaty between the US and North Korea, the subsequent withdrawal of the US troops from the peninsula, and the establishment of one federal government between North and South. Eventually South Korea will be like South Vietnam after

the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. Although the size of economy is beyond comparison between North and South, the North is likely to win without the intervention of the US, especially considering that the North has nuclear weapons which it will never give up and that South Koreans have no will to fight to protect themselves—they want peace but they never understand that peace and freedom have never been free and that war is often the means to attain its goal, peace.

The South Korean Right is also concerned about potential changes in US policies in case the pro-Chinese stance of Moon's regime continues. The US might engage in direct talks with North Korea, without the South, or the US might attack the North without consultation with the South or consideration of its casualties, which are estimated to reach well over 200,0000. The Right is especially worried about the possibility that the US will make a deal with North Korea. The US government does not really care about which Korea unifies the peninsula insofar as it remains on the US side. The US could be an ally with the unified Korea, North or South, against China, its primary enemy now, just as it is with Vietnam. Kim Jong-il, the father of Kim Jong-un, already made such an offer to the US government. The Kim family hates China more than the US. When the North unifies the South, according to Kim Jong-il, 10 million South Koreans will leave the country, 20 million will be purged, and the remaining 20 million South Koreans and 20 million North Koreans will live together on the peninsula.

The South Korean Right hailed President Trump's address in the Korean National Assembly. They lamented that the speech should have been made by South Korean President Moon. In essence, Trump emphasized that South Korea's economic development was possible thanks to American blood and sweat. North Korea is a cruel regime which exploits, oppresses, and tortures its people. The goal of developing nuclear weapons is to rule the South. The US will pressure and sanction the North until it completely abandons its nuclear weapons to uphold the values of freedom, democracy, and human rights. He urged other countries, especially South Korea and China, to join these endeavors. There will be no negotiation between the US and the North until the complete and irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear weapon system. North Korea

should not test the will of the US. It was a warning to South Korea against leaning towards China as well as a warning to North Korea and China. Jin Kim, a political commentator, described Trump's speech as lightning hitting the Blue House. It affirmed US rights in the affairs on the Korean peninsula.

The South Korean Left are very critical of the presence of the US troops stationed in South Korea. They lament the role the US has played since the late 19th century. They believe that Japan could occupy Korea with the understanding and support of the US government; that the US is responsible for the division of the Korean peninsula and the subsequent Korean War; that the US government supported, legitimized, and sustained the dictatorship of the military regimes for more than a quarter of a century; that the US government is the major threat to the reunification of two Koreas; and that South Korea is like a colony of the US. And now the US, with Trump's bellicose rhetoric, is threatening the tenuous peace in the peninsula. Trump is a war monger and arms dealer. He came to South Korea to sell American weapons by escalating tensions, as anti-Trump signs announced in the protest against his visit.

A column published in the *New York Times* in October 2017 by Han Kang clearly shows the ethos of the Left. Han was the recipient of the international Man Booker Prize in 2016 for her novel *The Vegetarian* and hailed and admired by both Left and Right regardless of their political predilections. In "While the US Talks of War South Korea Shudders" Han claims the American War in Korea was a proxy war imposed on the Korean peninsula by the US and Russia, in which millions of people were "butchered" including hundreds of "innocent South Korean citizens" massacred by the American soldiers at No Gun Ri. Although South Koreans look "unusually calm," they feel "the terror, the unease, the impotence, the nervousness" due to escalated tensions. The experience and trauma of war has been burrowed for over sixty years deep inside their minds. They understand only one thing, she said ironizing one of Trump's tweets: "any solution that is not peace is meaningless and the 'victory' is just an empty slogan, absurd and impossible." According to Han, along with President Moon and the South Korean Left, peace could be achieved by means of "the quiet and peaceful tool of candlelight"—dialogue and negotiations.

At the center of this war over history stands the former President Geun-hye Park, the first female president of South Korea whose impeachment was decided in March 2017 and who was arrested and put into prison and is now being tried. She did several things that the Left oppose. Her government dismissed a progressive labor party and imprisoned its leader for conspiracy to incite civil war, to subvert the liberal democratic system in South Korea and pursue the socialist system of North Korea. It closed down a South Korean industrial park in North Korea. It outlawed a teachers' union. It put a leader of a 'progressive' labor union in jail for an illegal and violent demonstration. It tried to create an alternative Korean history textbook written by a team of historians appointed by the Ministry of Education and let each school determine which textbook it will use. Finally, it stood on the side of the US despite its initial wavering between the US and China.

The South Korean Right believes her impeachment is a typical witch hunt made possible by one-sided and distorted media coverage, fake news, skillful manipulation of the mass of people by the Leftist cultural workers, and the overall Leftization of every important sector of Korean society for the past 30 years, including the court, government, academia, and media. Those students and particularly their leaders who spent their formative years in the 1970s and 1980s by protesting against the military regimes have worked hard for the past thirty years to change and seize the mind of the youngsters and eventually succeeded in occupying the Blue House. They run the country according to their ideology—pro-North Korea, pro-China, anti-US, pro-labor, anti-business. The cabinet members, even the President perhaps, are just a facade. They are managers and experts in demagoguery, propaganda, and manipulation but lacking in mentality, experience, and skills with which to construct something new. They are protesters, critics, and splitters. Park did nothing legally wrong to be impeached. Her impeachment was a devastating blow to the rule of law in South Korea. She denies all the charges against her and eventually decided not to appear in court, which she concluded has conducted a mock trial. It is ironic to watch a former president, who did not allow even her sister and brother to visit the Blue House to prevent the improper exercise of power by them, now facing (potential) life imprisonment

for bribery. The Left sees Park's trial as part of the candlelight revolution which should be continued until all injustice is purged by its light.

The inner civil war is being ferociously fought for the identity and legitimacy of South Korea which is in an official state of war with North Korea under the Korean War Armistice Agreement. The wall dividing South Koreans seems as invincible as the chain link fence with barbed wire that separates North and South. No wall shows more dramatically the division between South Koreans than the wall of buses which were lined up between two opposing demonstrations, one in support of the impeachment of the president, the other supporting her, to prevent the potential violence between their participants. Participants of the one carry candlelight, whereas those of the latter raise the Korean national flag together with the US' Stars and Stripes. To reflect on the inner civil war in South Korea is then in a powerful way to reflect on the US and to put into a broader and more historical context the relationship between South Korea and the US.



"A symbol of the efforts to re-unify the Korean peninsula is seen near the Demilitarized Zone in the Republic of Korea, Aug. 13, 2014. The site is one of many stops on a tour of the DMZ, and is also where visitors can walk through a portion of the third tunnel discovered to have been dug by members of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in an attempt to invade the ROK." (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Ashley J. Thum) www.osan.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/640348/photos-dmz-tour-offers-trip-through-history/

In the urgency of events in South Korea, it is entertaining but not enough to ironize the co-existence of the impulse to maintain the wall at the very moment one wants to destroy it. There seems no realistic option available to eliminate, even to lower, the wall in the Korean peninsula, no option that would somehow satisfy all the parties with their incommensurable interests and goals. To reverse Frost's irony, however, there may exist the impulse, dormant or hidden, to lower or eliminate the wall at the moment of strengthening it. Few could imagine the collapse of the Berlin Wall when it actually collapsed.

*Walls,
Material and Rhetorical:
Past, Present,
and Future*

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