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# Is Unification a Process or a Result?

## Based on the Concepts of Unification Perceived by the Public

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This research analyzed the concepts of unification perceived by South Koreans. The concepts of unification of the public are largely classified as ① the creation of a country with the two systems, ② unification with a more focus on the result (a single unified community) rather than the process (exchange and cooperation and the formation of Korean Commonwealth), and ③ unification with a focus both on the process and the result. There was no difference among three types in terms of the intensity of inclination toward unification and the level of tendency toward maintaining the status quo of division. On the other hand, a type with a view on unification as a process responded most positively to the perception of unification as investments and benefits and behavioral intention for unification. Such results indicate that more efforts are required as follows: ① a discussion on the definition of unification itself should be promoted and ② efforts to flesh out a task of making unification a process should be put in place.

Although most people may think that there is a clear agreement and understanding among the public on the definition of unification, not many concepts are as diverse as those of unification. A wide range of concepts of unification have been proposed and used in the academia and the

political circle: unification as an ideal and normative goal, unification as a practical goal, unification as a process, legal and institutional unification, de facto unification, transitional unification, unification through absorption, and unification triggered by dramatic events. Concepts of unification perceived in the South Korean society have expanded rather than converged as the divided state has remained in place for more than 70 years. It is, therefore, necessary to have various discussions on the ideal picture of unification that our society should pursue as a whole. However, such expansion of unification concepts is, in fact, indicative of the lack of even the minimum agreements in our society on what unification actually is. Reaching the minimum level of social consensus on the definition of unification is a prerequisite for realizing viable unification that our society should set as a goal.

Against this backdrop, it is necessary to first grasp the concepts of unification perceived by the public for building a social consensus on those concepts. To that end, Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) conducted a study called *Psychology of Peace* surveying people's perception and definition of unification. In more detail, it carried out research on whether people perceive steps laid out in the Korea National Community Unification Formula as unification. The survey proposed four different types of inter-Korean relations targeting 1,000 adults nation-wide. On a scale of one to five, respondents answered a question of whether each type of inter-Korean relations is equal to unification (1: It is not at all unification - 5: It is certainly unification).

- ① With the systems of the South and the North maintained, people in the two Koreas can freely come and go and even live in a territory of the other party for the short-term in accordance with a legal procedure similar to that of overseas trip (hereinafter referred to as "free movement between South and North Koreans").
- ② With the systems of the South and the North maintained, there are active exchanges and cooperation in various areas, such as the economy, society, culture, etc. (hereinafter referred to as "exchange and cooperation")
- ③ With the systems of the South and the North maintained, inter-Korean joint organizations are created and operated, including inter-Korean joint council and

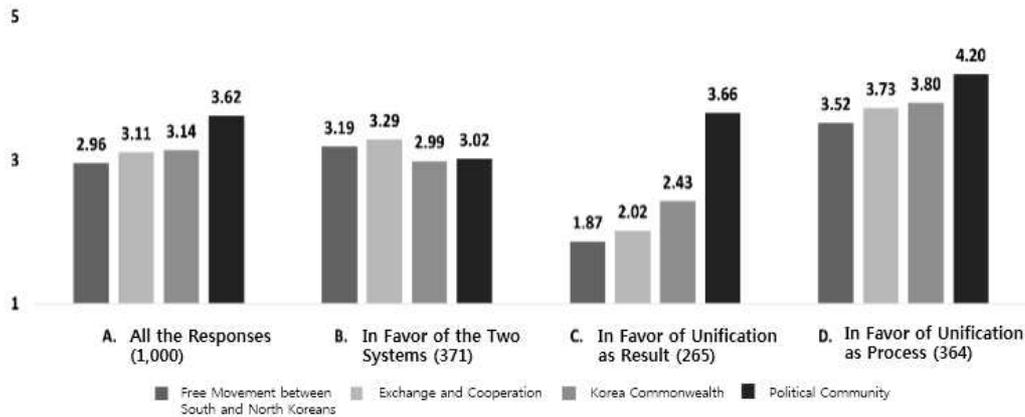
inter-Korean Cabinet meeting (hereinafter referred to as “Korea Commonwealth”)  
④ Organizations and institutions of the two systems are integrated with the formation of single government and single National Assembly—created through elections in accordance with Unification Constitution (hereinafter referred to as “political community”)

### **Three Types of Thoughts on Unification: 1) The Two Systems, 2) Unification as a Result, and 3) Unification as a Process**

The survey found that South Korean nationals have the strongest tendency to perceive the formation of a political community between South and North Korea as unification (3.62/5 point, Figure 1A). There is also a tendency of responses that the higher level of inter-Korean integration is more likely to be perceived as unification (free movement between South and North Koreans < exchange and cooperation = Korea Commonwealth). However, respondents showed a rather indecisive stance with an average point of three on whether unification equals free movement between South and North Koreans, exchange and cooperation, and the formation of Korea Commonwealth. Given a limited sampling of the average of 1,000 surveyed, South Korean people are analyzed to perceive unification as a result (the establishment of a single political community) rather than as a step and process (free movement between South and North Koreans, exchange and cooperation, and the formation of Korea Commonwealth).

However, a cluster analysis was conducted to identify whether such result is a reflection of a majority of the public or a mere statistical illusion—an analysis designed to have people grouped who show similar patterns of responses in a survey. An assumption is that if a majority of the public thinks of unification as a result, then only one cluster will be derived. In fact, the cluster analysis revealed three groups (Figure 1B-D).

<Figure 1> Average of Four Types' Perception of Inter-Korean Relations as Unification



The first cluster (hereinafter referred to as “a group in favor of the two systems,” 37.1%, Figure 1B) is a group with a strong tendency to view “free movement between South and North Koreans” and “exchange and cooperation” as unification as opposed to the formation of “Korea Commonwealth” and a “political community.” This group responded positively to a state of active free movement between South and North Koreans and exchange and cooperation giving higher points than the average three points. However, this group showed roughly an average level of responses to a question of the formation of Korea Commonwealth, a single unified community, under which inter-Korean joint organization is established. In other words, the group, to some extent, carries a sense of resistance to a phase of legal and institutional integration itself. Therefore, this group in favor of the two systems prefers the coexistence as an individual country, under which free movement and exchange and cooperation are possible, to a political integration between South and North Korea.

The second cluster is a group in opposition to a concept that unification is, in fact, a byproduct of the process, involving free movement between South and North Koreans, exchange and cooperation, and the creation of Korean Commonwealth (26.5%, Figure 1C). This cluster responded that unification is not equal to free movement between South and North Koreans (1.87/5 points), exchange

and cooperation (2.02/5 points), and the formation of Korea Commonwealth (2.43/5 points). Since this group responded that only the formation of a political community can be viewed as unification (3.65/5 points), it can be said that this group believes in the concept of unification as a byproduct of results (hereinafter referred to as “a group in favor of unification as a result”).

The last cluster, representing 36.4% of the entire responses, holds the view that unification is tantamount to all four clusters: free movement between South and North Koreans, exchange and cooperation, and the establishment of Korean Commonwealth and a political community (Picture 1D). However, as the level of integration deepens, more people are inclined to view the followings as unification in an order of a political community (4.20/5 points), Korean Commonwealth (3.80/5 points), exchange and cooperation (3.73/5 points), and free movement (3.52/5 points). It is indicative of phased and gradual unification perception of the public. This cluster is named as a group in favor of unification as a process given that the group seeks legal and institutional unification as a next step for achieving de facto unification.

In the meantime, there found no difference depending on age and ideology over a concept of unification: a group in favor of the two systems, a group in favor of unification as a result, and a group in favor of unification as a process.<sup>1)</sup> In short, people in a specific age group or with a particular ideology are analyzed not to prefer a certain concept of unification.

### High Level of Inclination toward Unification and Division

What kinds of impact does unification concept have on an attitude toward unification? To answer that question, 18 questions on inclination toward unification

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1) 1,000 people surveyed are composed of those in their 20s at 17.3%, 30s 17.1%, 40s 20.3%, 50s 20.1%, 60s and older 25.2%. Their ideological inclination was for conservatives at 23.3%, centralists 37.1%, and progressives 39.6%. Age and ideology of a group in favor of the two systems, a group in favor of unification as a result, and a group in favor of unification as a process demonstrated no statistical difference from the age and ideology of all the groups combined.

per group were analyzed, including four questions on inclination toward unification, four questions on inclination toward division, four questions on unification benefits and investments (budget), four questions on behavioral intention for unification, and two other questions (See Appendix).<sup>2)</sup>

Although a group in favor of unification as a process is analyzed to have somewhat stronger inclination toward unification compared to other groups, the three groups' inclination for unification is practically the same. A relatively higher number of a group in favor of unification as a process responded positively to the following questions: of four questions in the first category on measuring the inclination for unification, 1) the necessity for unification and 2) the priority of unification compared to economic issues; of four questions in the second category on measuring the inclination for division, 3) a change of life after unification, and 4) unification after the growth of North Korea (See Appendix 1). However, no difference was found among three groups in terms of the intensity and average of inclination for unification and inclination for division (See Appendix 2). When taken such analysis account, it would be fair to conclude that there is not much difference per group between the inclination for unification and the one for division.

A rather contradictory result was observed in that all three groups in general have higher inclination for unification as well as for division. For example, over 60% of all three groups responded that unification is necessary. However, the percentage of respondents who believe in maintaining the division is higher than those who think the opposite. A higher number of respondents in support of inclination both for unification and division has been consistently observed ever since KINU first surveyed the inclination for division in 2016. A clue to account for contradictory attitudes toward unification is revealed in expectation for benefits of unification, investments for unification, and detailed behavioral intention for unification.

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2) An analysis on elements found five classifications. Detailed results were not specified due to the limited space of paper. Appendix 1 describes the percentage of people in agreement to each question. Appendix 2 reveals the average of each question. Questions that show a difference per group are marked as shading in Appendix 1 and 2.

## Division for Changing the Status Quo VS. Division for Maintaining the Status Quo

Among a group in favor of unification as a process, 52% of them were positive toward the expansion of unification-related budgets, including unification education, research on unification and North Korea, and supports for North Korean defectors. On the other hand, only around 30% showed an agreement to the expansion of unification-related budget among a group in favor of the two systems and the one who perceives unification as an event. Those who perceive unification as a process are positive not only toward the investments for unification but also benefits that will be brought by unification. In particular, 41.2% of a group in favor of unification as a process responded that unification can be also beneficial at the individual level. Such response is in contrast to the existing conventional wisdom “South Korean people believe that unification is beneficial to the nation but not to individuals.” People who believe that unification is not beneficial at the individual level outnumber those who think the opposite among a group who perceives unification as an event and a group in favor of the two systems. Such result suggests that in order to build the social consensus on unification benefits, a change of perception may be needed in a way that views unification as sums of processes going beyond simply presenting economic costs and benefits of unification.

A positive perception toward benefits and investments for unification shown among a group in favor of unification as a process is also observed in detailed behavioral intention. Such group shows a forward-looking attitude toward tax increases for unification, exploration of information on North Korea, and exchange and communications with North Korean defectors. On the other hand, a group in favor of the two systems and the one in favor of unification as a result have a higher percentage of negative responses on the detailed actions for unification than the positive ones.

Meanwhile, it was not identified why there is a high inclination both for unification and division among a group in favor of unification as a process, a group in favor of unification as a result, and a group in favor of the two systems. However, this research at least provides a clue as to how people who view unification as a

process perceive the maintaining of the division. A group in favor of unification as a process views the division as a transitional period to achieve a goal of a single political community. In other words, a group in favor of unification as a process perceives the division not as maintaining the status quo but as a period required for changing the status quo. This is a convincing hypothesis to account for positive expectations for benefits, expansion of unification-related budget, and behavioral will for unification at the individual level.

By contrast, a group in favor of the two systems will not have much of an interest in an effort to change the status quo since this group perceives the strengthened division as unification. Lastly, a group in favor of unification as a result does not place a significant meaning in the process. This group is highly likely to put a focus on the collapse of North Korea rather than the unified Korea given that it demonstrates the strongest perception that unification is impossible without the collapse of North Korea.

### **Need a Question of “Is Unification Necessary?”**

The necessity for unification has always been the central theme of concerns of our society in the unification-related discourse. A discussion on the necessity for unification has so far been held under the following implicit assumption: ① there will be positive attitudes toward unification if there is an agreement on the necessity for unification, and ② positive attitudes toward unification will bring about various actions for overcoming the division. Such concerns on the necessity for unification are also reflected in questions on unification. “Do you think unification is necessary?” is the most representative question addressing the necessity for unification. Over the course of different periods, various organizations have conducted a survey into whether unification is necessary. This research on exploring the concepts of unification raises a question to the validity of the very question “Is unification necessary?”

The results of this research indicate that if a question of the necessity for unification is to grasp how much positive attitudes the public holds toward unification,

such utility is limited. It is because all the groups responded that unification is necessary with 68.2% for a group in favor of the two systems, 60.4% for a group that perceives results as unification, and 70.1% for a group that views the process as unification. In fact, it is somewhat ironic situation, in which all agree with the necessity for unification, but have a different picture of unification in mind.

If a question of the necessity for unification is to examine whether the public has intent to take practical actions for unification, then the utility of responses to the necessity for unification is also limited. A question of “Do you need unification?” does not predict the behavioral intention involving investments for unification, expectation for unification benefits, and overcoming the division at the individual level. This research illustrates that whether unification is thought of as the process predicts the detailed attitudes toward unification.

It is also required to reflect on the usual practice of giving excessive meaning to a question of the necessity for unification. The low level of agreement among younger generations to this question has been used as a tool to provide the older generations with moral superiority when it comes to unification issues. Issues of unification have been framed as an exclusive issue of the younger generations in the eyes of the older generations. As a result, education on unification and peace has always targeted students and younger generations. The results of this research, there is no generational gap in the concepts of unification, clearly demonstrate that unification is an issue that matters to the society as a whole, and not limited to a specific age group. Therefore, it is necessary to expand unification and peace education to a wider audience across all generations, going beyond the younger ones.

One alternative is to ask a detailed question related to the current status of inter-Korean relations instead of using an explicit word “unification.” For example, a question can be used differently such as “Is legal and institutional integration necessary?” However, the fundamental question that needs to be raised would be “What is unification?” as opposed to “Is unification necessary?” After all, it is time to ask a question of what unification really is that our society does and should rightly pursue. “Unification Pack of the Public,” one of pledges of the Moon Jae-in government, should also consider starting with a question of what unification is as

opposed to seeking an agreement on the necessity for unification.

### Unification Equals Process

The proposition “unification is a process as well as a result” encompasses a unification vision laid out in the National Community Unification Formula. The South Korean society, thus far, has only focused on unification as a result designed to build a single political community. However, the process of creating such a single political system has relatively been less emphasized. People who perceive the process as unification showed the most positive attitude toward unification in this research. The vision revealed in the National Community Unification Formula turns out to be still valid, a vision that postulates unification as a process. In particular, it should once again be noted that people who view unification as a process responded positively to both national and individual benefits that will be brought by unification. Unification benefits are not determined by simply weighing the pros and cons of costs and benefits but can be decided by whether unification is viewed as a process.

However, it is worrisome that merely one third of the population (36%) perceives unification as a process. As stated above, one cannot deny the influence of unification concepts that focus on unification as a result, involving unification through absorption and an argument for the collapse of North Korea. At the same time, it is also problematic that the premise of “unification equals the process” itself is highly abstract. While a “result” is visible and palpable, a “process” cannot be easily felt. It can be intuitively apprehended what it takes to establish a single political community between the South and the North and how it relates to a goal of unification. However, how the process of exchange and cooperation is related to unification should be elaborated in detail. To that end, it is required to flesh out the task of making unification a process palpable so that such process can be intuitively felt.

### Unification, Similar to Jigsaw Puzzle

Unification can be tantamount to putting the puzzle together. One cannot

tell the whole picture when looking only at pieces that are made up of the puzzle. The whole picture can be put together through the process of putting the pieces of the puzzle together. Unification is not like purchasing the puzzle that is already completed. The picture of unification can only be completed when pieces are put together by the governments and people of South and North Korea and surrounding countries.

The puzzle cannot be completed simply by preparing pieces in place. We have thus far prepared various pieces that will unfold after the formation of a single political community in the name of “unification preparation.” It is desirable to put down the pieces that could be placed in a puzzle board. One piece, understanding the history of North Korea, is crucial for social and cultural integration and coexistence after the formation of a single political community. To that end, now is the time to put that puzzle together. The same logic applies to railways and roads.

As more pieces are put down on a board, it takes less time to complete the puzzle. Anyone who has done a puzzle would know. The act of finding the right place and putting pieces together is a challenging and time-consuming task. Putting down the first piece of the puzzle, in particular, is all the more difficult. In the same vein, putting down the first piece of unification is expected to be an enduring process. However, as more and more pieces of unification are laid down, costs and time will be lessened that are needed for the creation of a political community and social and cultural integration and coexistence thereafter.

Unification as a process can be naturally learned in elementary school lower graders if they are offered a chance to put together the puzzle of unification. It will be more effective than lecturing them about the necessity for unification.

“If you love the process, the result will come find you.”

- Eric D. Thomas

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## <Appendix 1> Percentage of Agreement (Disagreement) on a Question of Attitude toward Unification

Category	Question	Two Systems	Unification as Result	Unification as Process
Inclination toward Unification	Unification between South and North Korea is necessary.	68.2(9.4)	60.4(15.5)	70.1(12.1)
	Unification is not really necessary if there is no danger of war.	44.5(21.5)	48.6(24.1)	46.2(26.3)
	We do not have to form a single unified country because South and North Korea are a homogeneous country.	32.3(25.6)	33.2(29.8)	38.2(24.5)
	Given a choice between an issue of unification and that of economy, I will choose an economic issue.	51.8(7.8)	60.8(14.4)	63.2(10.5)
Inclination toward Division	South and North Koreans can live harmoniously in a divided state	51.0(12.1)	52.9(17.8)	51.9(14.6)
	My life will not be hugely changed by unification	42.8(16.2)	48.6(23.0)	55.2(15.9)
	I do not care about the maintaining of the divided state if it does not bring much of a damage to me.	39.9(15.9)	40.0(23.0)	42.0(23.9)
	It is desirable to realize unification after North Korea's economic power increases to the level that is no longer burdensome to South Korea.	49.8(11.9)	64.9(11.7)	57.2(11.2)
Benefit/Investment	The unification-related budget should be expanded (e.g. unification education, research on unification and North Korea, and support for North Korean defectors, etc.).	35.8(21.0)	29.9(30.6)	52.8(13.2)
	Unification is beneficial to me and my family.	24.5(32.9)	23.4(37.7)	41.2(29.4)
	I know why unification has to be achieved.	37.7(17.8)	44.9(17.8)	51.3(17.3)
	Unification is beneficial to South Korea.	46.1(19.4)	47.9(21.1)	51.9(13.2)
Behavioral Intention	Take the small economic burdens (e.g. tax increase) for the sake of unification.	30.9(27.7)	34.7(39.3)	45.6(24.4)
	Read a text about the history of North Korea to understand its culture.	26.4(32.6)	26.4(45.3)	40.1(28.9)
	Try talking to North Korean defectors who have settled in South Korea to expose oneself to North Korea's culture.	28.3(32.1)	31.3(48.7)	41.4(23.1)
	Make a donation on a regular basis to unification-related civil organizations or NGOs.	15.9(46.4)	10.2(61.9)	26.1(34.1)
Etc.	Unification is impossible unless the North Korean regime collapses.	43.7(20.0)	52.4(15.5)	39.0(28.6)
	Fear comes to my mind when I think of post-unification situation.	29.1(29.1)	23.4(42.3)	25.8(41.2)

## <Appendix 2> Average (Standard Error) of Questions Addressing the Attitude toward Unification

Category	Question	Two Systems	Unification as Result	Unification as Process
Inclination toward Unification	Unification between South and North Korea is necessary.	3.70(.04)	3.59(.06)	3.75(.05)
	Unification is not really necessary if there is no danger of war.	3.32(.05)	3.31(.07)	3.31(.06)
	We do not have to form a single unified country because South and North Korea are a homogeneous country.	3.11(.05)	3.02(.06)	3.14(.05)
	Given a choice between an issue of unification and that of economy, I will choose an economic issue.	3.55(.04)	3.67(.07)	3.70(.05)
Inclination toward Division	South and North Koreans can live harmoniously in a divided state	3.44(.04)	3.40(.06)	3.43(.04)
	My life will not be hugely changed by unification	3.32(.04)	3.29(.06)	3.43(.05)
	I do not care about the maintaining of the divided state if it does not bring much of a damage to me.	3.27(.04)	3.16(.06)	3.25(.05)
	It is desirable to realize unification after North Korea's economic power increases to the level that is no longer burdensome to South Korea.	3.47(.04) <sup>a</sup>	3.66(.06) <sup>a,b</sup>	3.56(.05) <sup>b</sup>
Benefit/Investment	The unification-related budget should be expanded (e.g. unification education, research on unification and North Korea, and support for North Korean defectors, etc.).	3.16(.05) <sup>b</sup>	2.98(.06) <sup>a</sup>	3.50(.05) <sup>c</sup>
	Unification is beneficial to me and my family.	2.89(.05) <sup>a</sup>	2.85(.06) <sup>a</sup>	3.14(.05) <sup>b</sup>
	I know why unification has to be achieved.	3.21(.04) <sup>a</sup>	3.30(.06) <sup>a,b</sup>	3.40(.05) <sup>b</sup>
	Unification is beneficial to South Korea.	3.29(.05) <sup>a</sup>	3.33(.07) <sup>a,b</sup>	3.49(.05) <sup>b</sup>
Behavioral Intention	Take the small economic burdens (e.g. tax increase) for the sake of unification.	2.97(.05) <sup>a</sup>	2.81(.07) <sup>a</sup>	3.20(.05) <sup>b</sup>
	Read a text about the history of North Korea to understand its culture.	2.88(.05) <sup>b</sup>	2.67(.07) <sup>a</sup>	3.08(.06) <sup>c</sup>
	Try talking to North Korean defectors who have settled in South Korea to expose oneself to North Korea's culture.	2.88(.05) <sup>a</sup>	2.70(.07) <sup>a</sup>	3.19(.05) <sup>b</sup>
	Make a donation on a regular basis to unification-related civil organizations or NGOs.	2.55(.05) <sup>b</sup>	2.16(.06) <sup>a</sup>	2.85(.05) <sup>c</sup>
Etc.	Unification is impossible unless the North Korean regime collapses.	3.30(.05) <sup>b</sup>	3.51(.06) <sup>c</sup>	3.09(.06) <sup>a</sup>
	Fear comes to my mind when I think of post-unification situation.	3.01(.05) <sup>b</sup>	2.72(.06) <sup>a</sup>	2.81(.05) <sup>a</sup>

\* Results of posteriori tests were presented after conducting an analysis of variance. If an average of the two groups is not different, it will be marked in the same alphabet. For example, an average of a question "It is desirable to achieve unification after North Korea's economic power increases to the level that is no longer burdensome to South Korea?" is not different between a group in favor of the two systems and the one in favor of unification as a result (marked as "a"). An average between a group in favor of unification as a result and the one in favor of unification as a process is not different either (marked as "b"). However, an average between a group in favor of the two systems (a) and the one in favor of unification as a process (b) is different.