

# NGOs AND INTER-KOREAN SOCIO-CULTURAL EXCHANGES AND COOPERATION

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Now we are experiencing a major transition from 'Big Government' to 'Big Society.' NGOs are the main actors in 'Big Society.' If that transition is to be achieved in ways to serve the needs of the people, governments and individuals should assume a responsibility for strengthening institutional underpinnings of civil society. The situation applies to the Korean unification process. Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation are a very useful method to realize reconciliation between South and North Korea, and its activation through NGOs may contribute to unification process. This research focuses on the point that the activation of private sectors is necessary in inter-Korean relations, which show changes with the Sunshine Policy. Expanding inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation particularly in social and cultural areas will be a realistic way for promoting reconciliation between the two Koreas. Recovering national homogeneity between the two can also be achieved in social and cultural areas. In this vein, inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation should be expanded further. In addition, NGOs' participation in a field of unification and inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation should also be expanded. NGOs can be a trouble-solving

broker which can deal with issues difficult for the government. Exchanges and cooperation are tangible methods for rapprochement between the two Koreas. In particular, active inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation through the activities of NGOs can be conducive to consolidating a foundation for reunification and common social and cultural community in that it is based on a voluntary participation of civil society. This article analyzes inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation and role of NGOs. Recognizing the necessity of improving exchanges in private sectors, this study proposes a plan to encourage inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

## **I. Preface**

Toward the end of the 1980s, the Cold War structure in the world was dismantled. Since then the political situation surrounding the Korean peninsula has been changing. The wave of reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas has acted as a force supporting the dismantlement of the Cold War structure on the Korean Peninsula. According to the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea, a policy based on peace and cooperation, the South has been seeking to expand dialogue, exchanges and cooperation so as to dissolve the distrust and animosity that have persisted for over half a century and improve inter-Korean relations by recovering national homogeneity.

And now inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation are perceived as a realistic way to improve inter-Korean relations. One of the targets of the present stage is confidence-building between South and North Korea through inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation. And the participation of NGOs (Non-Governmental

Organizations) in expansion of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation has increased steadily.

It is a universal trend that the role of NGOs and their influence have been growing recently. Now NGOs in South Korea are required as a new inspector about the unification policy of the government. After when on the international level the Cold War structure dismantled and the democratization began to progress in South Korea, NGOs in the Korean unification field have been revived and begun to blossom. But, in spite of its recent blossom, many of the Korean NGOs are suffering from weak infra structure. NGOs in the unification field have not created an efficient relationship with government, and their financial base is very weak. And a self-regulating negotiation body for cooperation between NGOs has not been prepared.

Now the new perception of governance is forcing governments to look for help from other sectors of society, especially NGOs. NGOs can solve the problem that is difficult for government. Exchanges and cooperation are tangible methods for rapprochement between South and North Korea. In particular, active inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation through NGOs can be conducive to consolidating a foundation for reunification and common social and cultural community between the two Koreas, in that it is based on the voluntary participation of civil society. This article analyzes inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation and the role of NGOs. Recognizing the necessity of improving exchanges in the private sector, this study proposes a plan to encourage inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

## **II. NGOs in the field of Korean unification**

NGOs stand for “Non-Governmental Organizations.” It means a private organization which works for the public good. NGOs were

organized spontaneously to solve problems that governmental organizations could not. Individuals and the all organizations that are not established by agreement with government can become NGOs' members. NGOs are any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Many NGOs have qualified for consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).<sup>1</sup> According to article 71 of the UN charter, the Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements are governed by ECOSOC resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968, which makes provision for NGOs to be placed in consultative status with ECOSOC. Nowadays, NGOs are often called 'the third sector' along with government and enterprise, or 'the fifth department' along with the legislature, the judicature, the administration, and public opinion. And the number and scale of NGOs are increasing now.

The activities and forms of NGOs are various. Any organization such as international organization, domestic organization, voluntary organization, network, the service organization, the donation organization, the interest organization, the profession organization, local organization, and various organizations can be defined as NGOs.

There are many types of NGOs such as GONGOs (Governmental-Organized Non-governmental Organizations), QUANGOs (Quasi Non-Governmental Organizations), DONGOs (Donor-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations), and BONGOs (Business-Organized Non-Governmental Organizations).<sup>2</sup> Also, the term NGOs expresses a different meaning in each country. There are some coun-

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1 The term NGOs was used first time by the UN in 1949. But NGOs acquired negotiation position with UN by ECOSOC Resolution 288 (X) in 1950 and revision of ECOSOC Resolution 1296 (XLIV) in 1968.

2 Kim Yeong Rae "Research on Globalization strategy of South Korean NGOs," *International Political Science Symposium*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1997, p. 241.

tries that use the term 'Voluntary Organization.' Specially in case of the US, the term PVO (Private Voluntary Organization) or NPO (Non-Profit Organization) is often used. Also, the term VDO (Voluntary Development Organization) is used in southern Africa.<sup>3</sup> In Japan, the term NPO is used wider than the term NGOs, and NGOs are perceived as part of NPO.<sup>4</sup>

Important factors which define the term NGOs are as follows: non-government, non-profit, formation based on spontaneity, clear regulation and so on.<sup>5</sup> In the Korean language, there is some confusion between the term NGOs and civil organizations (shimin tanche). In the case of civil organizations, observance of rule of community, promotion of public good and voluntary participation of constituent, etc. are important as central factors of the organizations. On the whole, for civil organizations, private interest is more important than public interest. In case of NGOs, public interest is more important. But NGOs and civic groups are not divided definitively.

<Table 1> Division of civic groups and the NGOs

Organization	Private Interest	Public Interest
Civil organizations	A	B
NGOs	C	D

A. Secondary area of civil organizations

B. Primary area of civil organizations

C. Primary area of NGOs

D. Secondary area of NGOs

Data: Seong Gyeong Ryung and Kim Ho Ki, *Supporting NGOs for expansion of citizen's campaign* (Seoul: Ministry of politics, 1997), p. 13.

3 Kim Chae Hyeong, *NGOs activity of OECD* (Seoul: KOICA, 1992), pp. 8-9.

4 Lee Myeon Yoo, *Research on NGOs in Japan* (Seoul, 1998), pp. 3-5.

5 L. M. Salamon and H. K. Anheier, *In search of non profit sector: The question of definitions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1992).

Social movements against authoritarian regimes in South Korea made the basis for NGOs revitalization.<sup>6</sup> A turning point of the South Korean social movements against authoritarian regimes was July 1987. And from that time NGOs based on social movements have been strong.

There was no distinct division between anti-government movement and citizens' campaign, because of the similar goal of their organizations. But according to gradual development of democracy in Korea after 1987, divisions between the anti-government movement and citizens' campaign emerged. In the early time, the anti-government movement was more powerful than citizens' campaign but afterward the situation reversed itself. In the process of democratization, many types of NGOs have emerged in Korea, and they have tried to find new fields for their participation in society. For example, Citizens Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ),<sup>7</sup> Korean Federation for Environmental Movement (KFEM),<sup>8</sup> and People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD)<sup>9</sup> were founded at an early time in Korean NGOs

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6 Han Bae Ho, "Political change and state-civic society relation," edited by Korean sociological society and Korean political society, *The state and civic society in Korea* (Seoul: Hanwool, 1992), p. 75.

7 The Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice(CCEJ) was formed in response to the unjust structure of Korean economic life. CCEJ was founded in 1989 by 500 some persons representing various walks of life: economics professors and other specialists, lawyers, housewives, students, young adults and business people. Their slogan, "Let's achieve economic justice through citizens' power," reflected their belief that the deep-rooted economic injustices could not be cured by government alone, but ultimately must be solved by the organized power of citizens. They founded CCEJ as a movement that would 1) be led by the ordinary citizens; 2) use legal and non-violent methods; 3) seek workable alternatives; 4) speak for the interests of all people regardless of economic standing; and 5) work to overcome greed and egoism in order to build a sharing society, <http://www.ccej.or.kr/engindex.html>.

8 KFEM, founded in 1993, has grown as one of the influential NGOs in Korea, with its 85,000 members and 47 local branches working on various types of environmental issues, <http://english.kfem.or.kr/aboutus/aboutus1.htm>.

9 People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) was founded in 1994 by

history. Now NGOs are participating in every issue of Korean society and have a powerful influence in policy making by government. Since their establishment, NGOs have been serving as a watchdog against abuse of power, environmental pollution and many other social, political, and economic issues and providing alternatives.

Civic movements in Korea have indeed played a great role in checking the administration and the parliament since the late 1980s, when the nation was in the process of democratization following the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Since then, more than 20,000 citizens' organizations were created and some of them have grown to be gigantic NGOs with nationwide networks, even showing a trend toward trying to resolve political, social and economic problems by force.<sup>10</sup>

Because the authoritarian military government prohibited citizens' participation in unification issues, NGOs to the late 1980s had very little involvement in the unification issues such as National Unification Conference. But in 1990s the number of NGOs involved in unification issues increased drastically. And NGOs were more professional. Promoting the Sunshine Policy was a very important turning point for NGOs in the unification issues. Therefore, with the promotion of the Sunshine Policy, NGOs participated in unification issues more actively.

About 3,899 organizations and ten thousand organizations including branches were collected to the List of Korean NGOs<sup>11</sup> published in 1997. But by the more strict standard only 730 among organizations that were collected to the List of Korean NGOs could be included in NGOs' category.<sup>12</sup> In the mid 1990s, the number of NGOs has increased

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more than 200 members. PSPD is a civil organization dedicated to promote justice and human rights in Korean society through participation of the people, <http://pspd.org/pspd/main.html>.

10 *Korea Times*, 2001. 6. 18.

11 NGOs Times, *List of Korean NGOs* (Seoul: NGOs Times, 1997).

12 Kim Hyeok Rae, "Globalization and South Korea NGOs present condition," *Globalization and South Korea NGOs development way* (Seoul: Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice, 1997), p. 25.

to more than four times compared to the 1970s, and about half of them were founded after 1987. Korean NGOs have been developed not only on a quantitative level but also on a qualitative level. Now, NGOs are more professional and specific. And, NGOs are very active in every field of Korean society such as economic justice, environmental protection, and so on. NGOs that are developing very rapidly have a more powerful influence than in the past in Korea.<sup>13</sup>

Since citizens' participation in unification issues was allowed, the number of NGOs and their activity has been increasing. It is very difficult to count the exact number of NGOs related to unification issues. In 1994, Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ) found 250 organizations related to unification issues for research.<sup>14</sup> After 1998, the Kim Dae-jung Administration has pushed for an Engagement Policy with North Korea to improve inter-Korean relations by promoting peace, reconciliation, and cooperation. According to the Engagement Policy with North Korea, the number of NGOs related to the unification movement has increased. At the end of 2001, 95 NGOs were registered by the Ministry of Unification (MOU).

During the time government restricted civic participation in unification issues, NGOs were not active in the same issues. But NGOs could expand their role due to the democratization process of Korean society. And according to the change of North Korean policy after President Kim Dae Jung's inauguration, NGOs participation in unification field has also increased. And North Koreans' efforts for humanitarian aid from outside after 1990 have offered more chances to NGOs. Now many NGOs participate in humanitarian aid to North Korea.

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13 Kim Yeong Rae, "Research on Globalization strategy of South Korean NGOs," *International Political Science Symposium*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1997, pp. 251-253.

14 But about 170 organizations among 250 responded CCEJ's research. Unification Conference of CCEJ and The Dong-A IlBo, *The Korean NGOs which prepare unification* (Seoul: Unification Conference of CCEJ and The Dong-A IlBo, 1994), p. 5.



### **III. Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation**

#### ***1. The Sunshine Policy toward North Korea and Inter-Korean Socio-Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation***

Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation developed in close relation to the progress of the overall inter-Korean relationship. They were not promoted to a significant extent until the 1980s, when the two governments cautiously started to talk over their exchanges and cooperation. The two governments forged the Guidelines for Inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation in June 1989 and then, enacted and promulgated the Inter-Korean Exchanges and Cooperation Act in August 1990. Invocation of this law implies that dialogues between the two finally have a lawful foundation and that anyone in the South can officially exchange and cooperate with North Korea in conformity with the legitimate procedures. Since the beginning of the 1990s, exchanges and cooperation have generally been growing. Even though the social and cultural exchanges and cooperation have shown slower progress as a whole than economic endeavors, there has recently appeared a tendency indicating their further development.

The South Korean government has, for the past four years, been promoting 'the Sunshine Policy' toward North Korea, a policy based on peace and cooperation. As a result, a historic inter-Korean summit meeting took place for the first time in 55 years. The objective of the sunshine policy is peace and improvement of inter-Korean relations through reconciliation and cooperation. This means that instead of striving to achieve unification right at this moment, the policy seeks to first establish peace and realize coexistence and cooperation between the two Koreas.

The people's government has set the following three principles on the implementation of its sunshine policy toward North Korea: first, no tolerance of any military provocation which can destroy peace; second,

exclusion of unification of the kind that one side is absorbed by the other; and third, active pursuit of reconciliation and cooperation.<sup>15</sup> Based on these principles, exchanges and cooperation in social and cultural areas have been increased.

Through the sunshine policy toward North Korea, South Korea opened the door to institutionalization of various forms of exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas. The termination of hostility between the two Koreas through developing mutual respect for each other's system and easing tension will eventually lead to reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. It means the state of de facto unification. By promoting more contacts, exchanges and cooperation, the South has endeavored to move to a new stage in which the people of the South and North can travel freely back and forth between the two Koreas.

With the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung administration in 1998, inter-Korean cooperation in the cultural and art areas was promoted more actively than under any other administration in the past. And the summit between two Koreas was a turning point for expansion of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

Since a permission for cooperation partnership was first issued to allow the formation of a unified Korean team to compete in the 1991 World Table Tennis Championship held in Chiba, Japan, a total of 30 organizations received cooperation partnership approvals in the social and cultural areas until the end of year 2001. Approvals for seven of

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15 Ministry of unification, *White Paper on Korean Unification* (Seoul, 2002), pp. 30-33.

16 The leaders of the South and the North, recognizing that the first meeting and the summit talks since the division of the country were of great significance in promoting mutual understanding, agreed on five clause in joint declaration. The fourth clause joint declaration is related to inter Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation. The fourth clause is as follows: "the South and the North have agreed to consolidate mutual trust by promoting balanced development of the national economy through economic cooperation and by stimulating cooperation and exchanges in civic, cultural, sports, public health, environmental and all other fields." Ministry of unification, *White Paper on Korean Unification* (Seoul, 2002), p. 55.

these organizations, including Sports Art and Korean Welfare Foundation, were issued in 1998 while permissions were issued to another seven, including Hyundai Asan and SN21 Enterprise, in 1999. In the year 2000, the permissions were issued to nine other organizations, including the Korean Cultural Network Research Center and Korean Culture Foundation. In the year 2001, the permissions were issued to four other organizations. Among them, 24 received approvals for cooperation projects.<sup>17</sup>

With the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung administration in 1998, inter-Korean cooperation in the cultural and art areas has been increased. In May 1998, the Little Angels Art Troupe of Korean Culture Foundation performed in Pyongyang. The following October, along with South Korean musicians, the Hankyoreh Unification and Culture Foundation staff participated in a Yoon I-sang memorial concert held in Pyongyang. After that the two Koreas promoted follow-up performances and other cross visits in a wide range of musical genres, including classical, traditional Korean and popular songs, since the early 1999. KORECOM and SBS jointly sponsored the 2000 Peace and Friendship Concert in Pyongyang on December 5, 1999. On December 20, 1999 SN21 Enterprise and MBC sponsored the National Unification Concert, which featured a joint performance by popular singers from both South and North Korea.

A variety of bilateral events were held in commemoration of the first anniversary of the June 15, 2000 Inter-Korean Summit. The events included the performance in Pyongyang of a South Korean musical, *Chunhyang-jon*, a joint photography exhibition in Seoul and Pyongyang and a traditional costume exhibition in Pyongyang. A noteworthy event in the year 2000 was a long-term visit by a large group of North Korean performing artists. 102 members of the Pyongyang Student and Youth Art Troupe visited Seoul from May 24-30 at the invitation of

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17 Ministry of unification, *White Paper on Korean Unification* (Seoul, 2002), pp. 152-154.

Peace Motors and gave five public performances at the Seoul Arts Center to celebrate the upcoming inter-Korean summit. In addition, serving as the main sponsor, SN21 invited the Pyongyang Circus Troupe to Seoul. Consequently, 102 members of the North Korean circus troupe gave eleven rounds of public performances at the Jamsil Indoor Gymnasium from May 29-June 11. More than 130,000 South Koreans enjoyed their acrobatics. The significance of these performances lies in the fact that they were the first visits to Seoul by North Korean artists in ten years since an end-of-year traditional music concert for unification held in 1990.<sup>18</sup> In August, 132 members of the North Korean National Symphony Orchestra visited Seoul from August 18-24 for a joint performance with South Korean counterparts to celebrate the 55th anniversary of national independence and June 15 Inter-Korean Joint Declaration. The North Korean artists gave a total of four joint performances at the KBS Symphony Hall and Seoul Arts Center with such world-famous South Korean musicians as Sumi Jo and Hanna Chang. Subsequently in December, 82 members of the Kumgangsan Opera Troupe of the Chongryun (The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), a pro-North Korean organization in Japan, visited Seoul at the invitation of Korean Culture Foundation and gave four public performances at the Little Angels Arts Center from December 15-17.

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18 North Korean visits were drastically increased in 2000. In one year, more than half the total number of North Koreans who had visited the South between 1989 and 1999 visited the South. The increase was mainly due to an expansion in social and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas. The number of North Koreans who have visited the South in the social and cultural area in 2000 on major occasions is as follows: 102 during the performance of Pyongyang Student and Youth Art Troupe from May 24-27, 102 during the performance of Pyongyang Circus Troupe from May 27-June 11, 151 during the first exchange of separated families from August 15-18 and 136 during the second exchange of separated families from November 30-December 2. Ministry of unification, *White Paper on Korean Unification* (Seoul, 2002), pp. 110-112.

Exchanges in the athletic area showed no progress since the last time the two Koreas formed a unified Korean team to compete in the 1991 World Table Tennis Championship and World Junior Soccer Championship. The exchanges were finally resumed in 1999 and actively expanded thereafter. Hyundai Asan started to build an indoor sports complex in Pyongyang and the two Koreas had an inter-Korean basketball match to celebrate the opening of the sports center from September 28-29, 1999. This match was followed by the North Korean teams' return visit to Seoul from December 23-24. It was the first of its kind since a North Korean soccer team visited Seoul in 1991. In the year 2000, Woonbang sponsored an auto rally in the Mt. Geumgang area from July 3-4. A total of 228 South Koreans and 47 vehicles participated in the rally. In addition, South and North Korean athletes marched together at the opening ceremony for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, thereby showing to the world a touching symbol of inter-Korean reconciliation. In 2001, sports exchanges also took place in a variety of settings, including an international race-car rally and a motorcycle tour, both held at Mt. Geumgang.

Cooperation in the media and journalism sectors was also brisk. The heads of South Korean newspapers and broadcasting networks visited the North in 2000 and reached an agreement on inter-Korean media exchanges. Half a dozen South Korean media companies were allowed to report firsthand from North Korea. In addition, the visit by Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson, a joint May Day celebration, a joint Great Debate on Unification, and other events were extensively covered by reporters from both sides. And Joint ventures in the media and press area began in 1997 with a permission for a cooperation partnership issued to the Unification Culture Research Center of Joong Ang Ilbo for a field survey and investigation of cultural remains in the North. When the permission for a cooperation project was issued in the next year, staff from the center visited North Korea three times to collect data on historic relics in the North. The Korean Cultural

Network Research Center of the Kyung Hyang Shinmun was issued a permission for a cooperation project in 1998.

Inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation have progressed more actively in the tourism area than any other area. Along with the historic Mt. Geumgang tourism project, which started on November 18, 1998, the two Koreas are currently discussing tours of the other places in North Korea.

And Religious leaders also took part in the growing number of inter-Korean exchanges. Christians from South and North Korea held a joint Easter service and Buddhists from both sides of the border held joint services in 2000. In addition, a variety of associations including unification-related organizations, farmers and workers, staged joint events in 2001 at Mt. Geumgang to mark the first anniversary of the Inter-Korean Summit and in celebration of the August 15 Liberation Day.<sup>19</sup>

Visits in the social and cultural areas have been increased. During the period from the announcement of the Basic Guideline for Inter-Korean Exchanges and Cooperation on June 12, 1989 to the end of December 2001, the number of applications to visit the North submitted in the social and cultural areas was 360 from 2,888 applicants in total. Of these, 325 applications from 2,693 people were approved while 2,197 people made actual visits on 264 occasions not including Mt. Geumgang tourists. In the year 2001 alone, the number of applications to visit the North submitted in the social and cultural areas was 103 from 841 applicants in total. Of these, 94 applications from 775 people were approved while 701 people made actual visits in 84 occasions. The number of visits increased 4% from the previous year due to a substantial increase of visits in social and cultural areas.<sup>20</sup>

Under the People's government, inter-Korean socio-cultural

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19 Ministry of Unification, *White Paper on Korean Unification* (Seoul, 2002), pp. 154-161.

20 Ministry of Unification, *White Paper on Korean Unification* (Seoul, 2002), pp. 102-112.

exchanges and cooperation have some distinctive features.

First, one of the most visible improvements in inter-Korean relations since the inauguration of President Kim Dae-Jung is the surge in socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation. Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation have been expanded due to the reconciliation and cooperation policy with North Korea.

Second, at the period of Cold War, inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation used to be staged in a third country such as China, Japan, Russia, and USA. But after the summit, inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation have started to be held within the Korean Peninsula including personnel visits.

Third, some problems have been raised on the process of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation such as the August 15 team's visit scandal<sup>21</sup> and illegal use of North Korean copyright by the South.

Hence, it is necessary for both sides to ensure unconstrained social and cultural dialogues and cooperation, which should be understood as fundamental efforts to integrate the two separated societies and overcome their differences following national reunification. In this regard, dynamic cooperation with NGOs is essential and efforts should be made not only by NGOs themselves, but also by the government through various channels.

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21 South Korean investigation authorities investigated South Korean delegates who allegedly made pro-North Korean remarks and activities during their recent visit to North Korea for joint inter-Korean Liberation Day celebrations. 16 among 337 South Korean delegates attended weeklong inter-Korean Liberation Day events 2001 received arrest warrants. Among them are five officials of the Pan-national Alliance for Reunification of the Fatherland, or Beomminnyeon. Some members of the South Korean delegation were reported to have praised the late North Korean President Kim Il-sung and National Defense Commission Chairman Kim Jong-il during their stay in the North, a violation of the National Security Law. And on August 17, professor Kang Jeong-gu of Dongguk University signed the guest book at Mangyongdae, the birthplace of the late North Korean leader Kim, generating controversy in South Korea, *The Korea Herald*, August 24, 2001.

## ***2. Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation and role of NGOs***

Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation should be understood as a basic long-term process for social integration between the two Koreas. Social and cultural areas mean the everyday world of life. The basis for social integration between the two Koreas can be achieved through inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation. And NGOs must be perceived as main actors in civic society. In this sense, the role of NGOs in inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation should be interpreted more broadly. NGOs can make a contribution to build social infrastructure for unification and be a main actor in inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

For unification between the two Koreas, the most important point is creating national consensus. And NGOs can take the leading role for national consensus. NGOs must criticize the government's policy toward North Korea, but at the same time try to make a cooperative relationship with government. NGOs can be involved to a varying degree in many aspects of government's work for unification. In practice, NGOs in some unification fields, such as exchanges and cooperation in social and cultural areas, humanitarian aid, and human rights are every bit as lively, complex, diverse and influential as in environmental and social movements. For this reason, the role of NGOs in unification fields is so uncontroversial that the importance of NGOs-government cooperation is taken for granted by even government and officials.

Under the Cold War structure, the two Korean governments restricted NGOs' participation in the unification field, and NGOs could not play a meaningful role on both sides. The North did not permit thorough unification debates that departed from the government's official position. In fact, there is no evidence that in North Korea 'true' NGOs exist. In fact, all NGOs in North Korea are bureaucratic organi-



zations controlled by the government. In South Korea, participations in unification issues by NGOs were seriously restricted by authoritarian regimes. During this time, it was a very difficult task for NGOs to participate in the unification field against the government's official position.

But since 1998 specially after the summit between the two Koreas, the situation has changed. After the inauguration of Kim Dae Jung's administration, it has pushed for the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea to improve inter-Korean relations by promoting peace, reconciliation, and cooperation. According to the Sunshine Policy toward North Korea, inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation have been increased. And NGOs' participation in inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation and creating of national consensus have been increased.

Inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation could not be controlled by politics. Now, with high expectations and the interest of the people, the government's unification policy can no longer ignore public sentiments. Now, Korean people have begun to express optimism about unification. And NGOs can be a main actor to people's sentiments. It is time for NGOs and government to cooperate. NGOs must influence a policy toward North Korea for peaceful progression of inter-Korean relations. The government will be able to develop a more effective unification policy by incorporating the views of NGOs critical to its policies. And the objectives of Sunshine Policy toward North Korea cannot be achieved only by some symbolic national event itself, and must be interpreted as a long-term process. NGOs must take a major role in dissolving distrust and animosity that have persisted for half a century between the two Koreas. NGOs can incorporate the views of the people: they must try to create a national consensus for Korean unification.

#### **IV. Building supporting structure of NGOs for expansion of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation**

##### ***1. Creating cooperative relation between NGOs and government***

For a long time under the authoritarian national system in Korea, the government and the NGOs have sustained a relationship of unilateral control and unyielding criticism. Therefore, it is very significant to create a new relationship between them in which NGOs function as “a critical supporter.” To this end, a firm cooperative linkage between them should be built to assist prospective activities of the NGOs involved in reunification issues as well as inter-Korean dialogues and cooperation on the precondition that it will guarantee the autonomy and independence of the NGOs to pave the way for active socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

Now, the term governance is not only related to government but also to NGOs. The term governance is interpreted in a more broad sense than the past, and NGOs are accepted by the people as one axis of it. The new perception of governance is forcing governments to look for help from other sectors of society and means governments can no longer afford to see these other sectors solely as competitors or threats. Therefore, NGOs-government cooperation is needed now. It is a crucial role for NGOs to criticize government policy. But at the same time, NGOs must create a cooperative relation with government. NGOs' work for society can be more effective through a cooperative relation with government. As we see in case of western society, NGOs have a cooperative relation with government. Government is also able to develop a more effective policy by having a cooperative relation with NGOs.

In Korea, during the Cold War period, the government was very sensitive about NGOs' participation in government policy. As a result, government and NGOs have a very short history of cooperation. But

now government and NGOs are trying to create new cooperative relations. It is very important for NGOs to become a critical cooperator with government. NGOs could expand their activities for the mutual supplementation with government. By creating a national consensus for Korean unification and expansion of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation, it is very necessary to create a cooperative relation between NGOs and government.<sup>22</sup> Government must support NGOs that are participating in inter-Korean socio-cultural cooperation. But if NGOs depend on only government support, NGOs cannot achieve their original goal. Through cooperation, NGOs and government can carry out their duty for society more effectively.

Now it is more effective for NGOs and government to share the role for expansion of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation. Today, governance solely by a government seems no longer responsive. The model of shared governance is more effective where government and NGOs become partners to address and solve unification issues. Governments guarantee NGOs' participation in planning, legislation, supervision and evaluation of government unification. And government is needed to participate in the programs in which NGOs have the initiative. Government must entrust areas to NGOs which NGOs can more effectively and efficiently perform. One of the possible ways for NGOs-government cooperation in unification issues is NGOs' participation in the Inter-Korean Exchanges and Cooperation Promotion Council. Through participation in the Inter-Korean Exchanges and Cooperation Promotion Council, NGOs can influence government unification policy and government can hear voices from NGOs and civic society.

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22 Cho Min, *Role of NGOs in the process of Korean unification* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 1999), pp. 20-24.

## ***2. Financial support to NGOs***

For the civil movement, which has shown a relatively rapid quantitative growth since the 1990s, financial problems are the most impending issue undermining its promotion with a long-term vision. As the same is true of the NGOs concerned with Korean reunification issues, the government should seek support measures in various ways to ensure their independence. The Government needs to consider providing endowment funding, or to increase the sources of such funding, as in the case of the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund Act. So far, the fund for inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation has been provided to very limited areas, but it is time that it should be spent to support the NGOs so that they can diversify and energize their cooperation projects. At the same time, a private fund should also be raised and a measure to spend it flexibly needs to be pursued in parallel with solving the financial problems. In this case, a consultative organization for the NGOs should be the main body for fund-raising as well as spending, as it is not desirable that a particular NGO manages the fund.

The routes to help the NGOs should be diversified as well, by learning and adapting the advanced nations' ways of financial support for the development of NGOs. Since it is troublesome to push through exchange and cooperation programs at the governmental level, sub-contracts which put up the NGOs in a representative capacity could be applied to the NGOs' assistance to the North as well as exchange and cooperation programs. Co-financing may be effective in that first, there are currently enormous differences in scales and actions among NGOs interested in inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, and second, unilateral assistance provided by the government might intensify the dependence of the NGOs.<sup>23</sup>

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23 Cho Han Bum, *A plan to promote social and cultural exchanges and cooperation between the South and the North Korea through the NGOs* (Seoul: KINU, 1998), pp. 46-50.

Also, NGOs that want to participate in inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation must prepare more effective programs to receive governmental subsidies. But if NGOs are mainly dependent on subsidies from the government, the difficult position of NGOs can be aggravated. Therefore, it is necessary for NGOs to expand their self-financing ability.

### ***3. Revision of legal and regulatory framework for NGOs***

In order to rev up NGOs' actions in the exchange and cooperation field, it has also been claimed that some institutional revisions should be made, such as improvement of the approval system to contact North Koreans, simplification of procedures for exchange and cooperation led by civil organizations. The Government needs to provide more support not only fiscal but also legal and regulatory frameworks to NGOs participating in unification field.<sup>24</sup> If we want NGOs to play a greater and more constructive role for Korean unification, we need to begin by re-examining the existing laws and regulations.

After the economic crisis, the Korean government has come to recognize the advantages of liberalizing private business sectors as well as the importance of assuring appropriate supervision and strengthening banking systems. Deregulation, structural adjustment, and privatization are now widely accepted. But neither the government nor the agencies that advise and support them, has applied the same logic to NGOs. The Government needs to devote more attention to NGOs and ask such questions as: do the laws make clear provisions for NGOs? Is the ability for groups to organize a right protected by law or a privilege to be according at the government's discretion? How complicated, time consuming and arbitrary is the registration process? Does the tax code encourage or discourage contributions to NGOs pursuing public

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24 *Ibid.*, pp. 52-54.

purposes of unification? Besides, the government must also modify regulations to allow NGOs to engage in revenue generating activities as long as the income is used for public purposes of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation.

Also, discounts of various public utility charges mean virtual support. Other methods should be developed as well, including tax breaks on several public services such as postal delivery, easing regulations for collecting contributions, tax breaks on business with a humanitarian purpose, and a device to rev up fund-raising campaign through an automatic response system.

#### ***4. Alliances and networks of NGOs***

Korean NGOs' recent actions participating in the unification field have exposed numerous problems, with many of them sometimes resorting to activities that go beyond the law. One of the typical examples among them is the Liberation Day scandal by the South Korean delegation in North Korea in 2001. The NGOs in the unification field should honor a basic rule of law more strictly in order to win the public support. Because the Cold War structure on the Korean peninsula still has not been removed, unification issues are very sensitive and controversial for the people. Morality and non-partisan affiliation should be the basic values of NGOs. They should be reborn as civic movements for the citizens, by the citizens, and of the citizens.

Revitalization of exchanges and cooperation by private sectors as well as diversification of their channels might lead to excessive competition among NGOs and bring about certain side effects. It is therefore necessary to prevent such effects by organizing an independent consultation body, which would enable NGOs to exchange information and launch joint cooperation programs. Furthermore, it would help them maintain more effective cooperative ties with the government. At the same time, establishing civil consultation organizations should keep

pace with setting up a network system among NGOs combined with specialization according to each field. The Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation (KCRC), established in September 1998, can be evaluated as a crucial consultation body. It is also significant in that it was founded at a time when a consultation body or a central organization was desperately needed for inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation driven by the private sector. Therefore, KCRC should be managed as an authoritative and independent consultation body for reunification issues and exchanges and cooperation between the South and the North. A consultation organization for every technical field should be considered as well.

As most of the NGOs have their own area of specialization, social and cultural exchanges and cooperation projects should be implemented by NGOs with the most specialty and know-how. Furthermore, joint efforts with international NGOs will mollify a negative response from the North and raise the feasibility of success in North Korean business projects. Hence, NGOs engaged in social and cultural exchanges and cooperation between the two Koreas should tighten their ties and actively cooperate with international NGOs in every field.

Now it is necessary for NGOs to strengthen planning, management, and fund-raising capacities. Therefore, one of the important needs for NGOs I would like to stress is to build strategic alliances and networks of NGOs both within and across national boundaries. Networking can facilitate the exchanges of experience. Coalitions among governments, businesses, and NGOs can increase the impact of their programs. National associations of NGOs can also take a responsibility for self-government of the sector.<sup>25</sup>

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25 *Ibid.*, pp. 55-59.

## V. Conclusion

Now, the role of Korean NGOs and participation in the unification field are augmented, and their activities which organize requests of civic society are promoted. I have tried to analyze a current situation of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation and the role of NGOs. And I have tried to suggest some of the major needs facing NGOs and what government can do to help. For creating peaceful progression in the South-North Korean relations, the role of NGOs must be expanded. And for the expansion of NGOs' role in Korean unification issues, the crucial starting point is to recognize the complex nature of Korean unification.

Expanding inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation especially in social and cultural areas is a realistic way for reconciliation of the two Koreas. The meaning of 'society' and 'culture' in the process of Korean unification is very important because recovering national homogeneity between the two can be achieved in social and cultural areas. For this reason, inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation must be expanded more than in the past. Also, NGOs' participation in the unification field and inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation must be expanded.

Now we are experiencing a major transition from 'Big Government' to 'Big Society.' NGOs are main actors in 'Big Society.' If that transition is to be achieved in ways that serves the needs of the people, governments and individuals must take a responsibility for strengthening institutional underpinnings of civil society. The situation is the same in the Korean unification process.

In short, ensuring the independence of NGOs is the most critical factor in promoting inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation. Not only efforts by NGOs themselves, but also minimizing government controls as well as a political community are indispensable conditions so as to protect NGOs' transparent actions. Only when such



conditions are met would revitalization of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation through NGOs be evaluated as a significant and feasible method for reconciliation and cooperation between the South and the North.