

Dr Holmer Brochlos

Free University Berlin, Germany

Cultural Identity between North and South Korea and Prospects for Unification

The question of cultural identity is actually a topic which exceeds the dimensions of a paper such as this, especially if you consider the definition of culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”¹ Or, to you look at a more general example among the hundreds of definitions of culture, it is “the forms or ways of life of a human group (a people or nation, or a class) as a whole.”²

It is not surprising at all that during 60 years of national division and extremely opposite social development, the forms or ways of life, too, have developed quite differently. Everybody who has been to South Korea and then travels to the North (or vice versa) inevitably gets a “cultural shock”. If you are judging just by appearances one could get the impression that actually there does not exist any cultural identity between the two Koreas at all.

But if you take a closer look you will find out that the situation is not as dramatic as it seems to be at first sight. One has to realize that, above all, culture is a historic process, and so one should not take a static view of it but rather look at its development. This is one important aspect.

The second aspect is that culture is always related to a certain group or class. With the foundation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 1948 the state postulated the creation of a so-called “socialist national culture” (*Sahoejuuijeok minjok munhwa*) which has been and is still defined as follows:

¹ The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th edition 2003, vol. 29, p. 328

² Bertelsmann Universal Lexikon in 20 Volumes, Gütersloh 1991, vol. 10, p. 192

National culture (*Minjok munhwa*) is “the **progressive** and **people-related** material and intellectual culture which reflects the history and traditions of a nation as well as customs and feelings of a people.”³ Joined by the attribute “socialist”, it becomes “culture that fills national forms with socialist content”.⁴ It is interesting to note that in former East Germany, the official definition of culture was similar. They stressed the cultivation of the humanistic national and international cultural heritage and its adoption by the working people.⁵ On the contrary, in the Republic of Korea (ROK) national culture is understood as “culture that, based on the language, customs, traditions, feelings etc. of a nation, expresses the characteristics of that nation”.⁶ If you compare these definitions you can already see the basic difference, rooted in the different social systems. For North Korea it meant that the so-called “*Yangban* culture”, that is the culture of the nobility which ruled Korea until the beginning of the 20th century, is the culture of the exploiters, is feudalistic and therefore bad and backward and not worth cultivating. On the other hand, the culture of the so-called “people’s masses” is good, had been suppressed, has now become progressive and therefore has to be further developed. This basic approach is, on principle, still valid today. Interestingly enough, the attitude in South Korea had been quite the opposite and this can be seen in the relatively late recognition of the *Minjung* culture and *Minjung* art. In North Korea a couple of other factors combined with the basic approach above shown. For example, during the first years after the foundation of the DPRK, a general Sovietization took place, a tendency also seen in the other countries of the Eastern Bloc at that time. This was also influenced by the fact, that Kim Il Sung and some other leading North Korean figures received a decisive part of their education in the Soviet Union.

³ *Joseonmal sajeon* (Dictionary of Korean Language), *Gwahak baekgwasa jeon chulpansa*, Pyeongyang 2004, p. 562

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 745

⁵ BI Universallexikon in 5 Volumes, VEB Bibliographisches Institut Leipzig 1986, p.240

⁶ *Urimal keun sajeon* (Great Dictionary of our Language), *Eomungak*, Seoul 1999, vol. 1, p. 1560

Later on, there were also the negative influences of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution.

In fact, the North Korean leadership had stressed from the very beginning, that they would combine these "western" influences with traditional Korean elements. So the positive thing about this political guideline was that there was no blind adoption of Soviet or Chinese Culture and Arts. On the other hand it can only be seen as a negative point that this 'combining' did not intend to cultivate Korean cultural traditions. This is in fact a totally opposite fundamental understanding of how to deal with cultural heritage, especially compared for example to the approach in former East Germany. It appears odd if for example in a music performance rhythms of a *Gayageum*, a traditional Korean half-tube zither with 12 strings, are mixed with sounds of an accordion⁷, or if girl soldiers wearing a pleated skirt perform traditional Korean dance movements, or if traditional folk songs like *Dorajikkot* (Bell Flower) get a new text praising the Great Leader. Yet this is exactly what the North Koreans understand under the above mentioned "filling the national forms with socialist content". Fortunately enough, cultural policy in former East Germany did not go to such extremes because, even though the social systems seemed to be similar on the outside, as mentioned above, the social circumstances were completely different on the inside.

North Korea intensified this kind of cultural policy especially from the mid-1960ies when they established, in line with the enforcement of the *Juche* (self-reliance or autarky) ideology, the so-called *Juche munye riron* (*Juche* theory in arts and culture). From now on each and every thing had to be focussed on the personality cult around Kim Il Sung, the party and revolution. Six model-type revolutionary operas were created, for example "The Party's real Daughter" (*Dangui chamdoen ttal*) and "Sea of Blood" (*Pibada*), the titles alone speak volumes. All arts and culture had to conform to these models – foreign works

⁷ The accordion allegedly was Kim Il Sung's most favourite musical instrument, so it had to be incorporated into each and every piece of music composed in North Korea. It still is very popular even nowadays.

were suppressed completely. Many national traditional cultural elements were simply neglected. One of the most evident examples of this is the most famous Korean folk song *Arirang*. In the 1960s and 1970s it was completely neglected, considered as feudalistic, decadent and unrevolutionary. The students at Kim Il Sung University, where I studied from 1978 to 1980, did not even know it.

From about the mid-1980s on, the situation slowly began to change. There was a kind of re-thinking of traditions and their interpretation in the sense of the new slogan *Joseon minjok jeiljuui* (The Korean nation is the greatest/the best). This tendency could be clearly observed especially in the field of literature: After quite a long break, works of Korean classic literature were published again⁸, and for example novels were written with a plot laid in the time before the birth of Kim Il Sung⁹. In addition, many international literary works were translated and published.¹⁰ This return to national, traditional elements increased further in the 1990s. One reason for this was the improvement of relations and contacts with South Korea, as a result of which North Korea felt compelled to improve their own image. Also, they realized that cultivation of national cultural heritage would have positive effects on tourism, something they have been trying to foster as a source of foreign exchange earnings since that time.

Of course, all these positive signs do not alter the fact that in literature and in other highly ideology-laden areas, there still exist vast differences between North and South. In the ROK a highly interesting and complex literary scene has developed on an international level, which was impressively demonstrated at the Frankfurt Book Fair last year, when Korea was the guest of honour country. Contrary to that, in the DPRK, literature has been and still is a “weapon in the

⁸ The series *Joseon gojeonmunhak seonjip* (Selected Works of Classical Korean Literature), comprising more than 20 volumes, was published by *Munye chulpansa* in Pyeongyang. For example, vol. 11, published in 1985, was one of the most famous Korean classics: *Honggildongjeon* (The Story of Hong Gil-dong).

⁹ The most famous novels include: *Gabo nongmin jeonjaeng* (The Peasants' War of 1894), 3 volumes, by Bak Tae-won, 1977-86; *Imopungun* (The Military Uprising of 1882) by Bak Chun-myeong, 1981; *Kim Jeong-ho* (a novel about the most famous Korean geographer from the late Yi Dynasty) by Gang Hak-tae, 1987. All published by *Munye chulpansa* in Pyeongyang.

¹⁰ Even such works like H. G. Wells' “The War of the Worlds” were published: *Uju jeonjaeng*, *Munye chulpansa*, Pyeongyang 1984.

class struggle”. The “most important works of literature”, that is those about the deeds of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il, are still written by so-called “creative teams” (*Changjakdan*), something which is unthinkable in the South and maybe even in the rest of the world. This of course does not mean that North Korean literature from the linguistic or stylistic point of view is worse in general. On the contrary, there are quite a few works of excellent linguistic-literary quality, but they all lose their value due to the obtrusive ideological garnish. Although there is no evidence about an open or even organized opposition, I am quite sure that there are at least some people in North Korea who are, so to speak, ‘underground’ writers. This is an exciting thing, and with ongoing improvements of South-North relations in the future – not to mention in case of unification – I am sure that some brilliant pieces of literature will eventually see the light of day.

As regards fine arts, for example pictorial art, in the ROK you can find a modern art scene which encompasses each and every style or direction that exists in the world. In the North, this is lacking completely. But nevertheless, there are a few areas where there are similarities, for example *Hangeul* (Korean script) calligraphy. There are a lot of traditional Korean elements and motifs which still play an important role in the arts of both sides, for example the ten symbols of longevity (e.g. deer, crane, pine tree, bamboo) or lucky animals (e.g. tortoise, dragon, and phoenix). All these motifs do appear in the North even in everyday art, for example as design elements of fountains or public parks. Interestingly, in this context even motifs originating from religion – something which has been virtually abolished in the North – are still kept alive. Examples of this are the lotus flower used as a symbol of truth and purity in Buddhism, (even though there are no Buddhist believers any longer,) or motifs from traditional folk beliefs and astrology, such as the 12 signs of the zodiac, (although there are no official fortune tellers (*Jeomjaengi*.) Another interesting question in this context is shamanism, which also does not exist any longer officially in the DPRK. But I

am quite sure that even today in the countryside or in remote mountain areas, shamanist ceremonies called *Gut* are still being practised, albeit in a “light version” compared to the rituals in the South, but taking place nonetheless. A cultural element so deeply rooted in Korean tradition can not be abolished by decree within a few decades.

In the arts of sculpture there are also some striking similarities between North and South. I mentioned at the beginning that one has to look at culture and arts in their historic development. If you accept that, you can find remarkable similarities between monumental sculptures in the North and those in the South created during the 1960s and 70s, (that is, under the reign of President Park Chung-hee.) This is surely due to the fact that the nature and appearance of dictatorial regimes are governed by very similar patterns, independent of time and place. Other similarities can also be found in fields such as architecture: In the 1960s and 70s there was the tendency in both parts, North and South, to build monumental structures in traditional forms, but made of concrete. Examples in Pyongyang are the Great Theatre (*Daegeukjang*) and the People’s Palace of Culture (*Inminmunhwagungjeon*), in Seoul the Sejong Cultural Hall (*Sejongmunhwahoegwan*).¹¹

Let’s take just a short look at the field of handicrafts. In both parts of Korea, traditional forms and techniques have been cultivated, so maybe the widest range of identity can be found here, although of course, the institutionalization differs greatly. Ceramic ware and traditional pottery, for example, the world-famous *Goryeo* celadon, is still being produced in the North too, whereas other traditional Korean handicrafts, for example lacquer works, furniture and brassware, suffer from a lack of raw material, so therefore there is more emphasis on wood carving, embroidery and jade or soapstone cutting.

So what is the present state of culture and cultural policy in the DPRK? In official terms, North Korea is practising the so-called “revolutionary culture of

¹¹ In the North, even historic buildings were reconstructed using concrete, for example the South Gate (*Nammun*) of the *Daeseong sanseong* (*Daeseong* Mountain Fortress) in Pyongyang.

the army first” (*Seongun hyeongmyeong munhwa*). This implies that every cultural activity and all works of art have to be in accordance with the zeitgeist, the genius of the period. And this zeitgeist consists in the “army-first-policy” (*Seongun jeongchaek*), which had been proclaimed by Kim Jong Il in 1995 after the sudden death of his father the year before, and was followed by several years of hardship that brought the North Korean system on the brink of existence, afterwards palliatively named the “march of suffering” (*Gonanui haenggun*). The most striking example for that *Seongun* cultural policy is the mass game *Arirang*, in which the North Korean regime indulges in self-adulation. The first version of that monumental show in the “May Day Stadium” in Pyeongyang was performed from April to July 2002, and the second version saw its first performance in August 2005 on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of liberation from Japanese colonial rule. As the title for the show they used the most popular Korean folk song that had been neglected in the North until the mid-1990s. This fact shows that the North Korean leadership has realized that measures to restore and foster cultural identity with the South would in the end serve to maintain and stabilize their own system.

Here are some more examples of activities which can be seen in this context. In May 2003 a Folklore Street (*Minsok geori*) has been opened in Sariwon, the capital of South Hwanghae Province, around the historic pavilion *Gyeongamru*, comprising a museum, folklore sculptures and a so-called *Minsok cheyuk orakjang*, - a playground for folklore sports such as seesaw, swing and tug-of-war. In September 2003 an exhibition of Korean National Costumes (*Joseonot jeonsihoe*) was opened in Pyeongyang. Of course, in South Korea the national costume is not called *Joseonot* but *Hanbok*, and there are also many differences with regard to the contents, apart the name. However, the fact itself that in both parts of the peninsula the tradition of Korean national costumes is being maintained is a positive matter and contributes to the cultural identity. The same

goes for Korean national food. Since 1993, every year in April a Korean Food Festival (*4worui myeongjeol ryori chukjeon*) has been organized in Pyeongyang.

A very interesting point is the comparison between national holidays in both parts of Korea, which tells us a lot about cultural identity and the changing attitude in North Korea. At first sight, only two holidays are the same: New Year's Day (1 January)¹² and Liberation Day (15 August)¹³. This is because these two are the only ones among the ten official holidays in North Korea - called *Gukga myeongjeol* ("state holidays") - which are not ideologically biased. All others have their origin in North Korea's political system and therefore nothing to do with the ROK. They are as follows: 16 February - Kim Jong Il's Birthday (*Widaehan ryeongdoja gimjeongildongji tansaeng ginyeomil*)¹⁴, 15 April - Kim Il Sung's Birthday (*Taeyangjeol*)¹⁵, 25 April - People's Army Foundation Day (*Inmingun changgeonil*), 1 May - International Worker's Day (*Gukjerodongjeol* or *O il jeol*), 27 July - Victory Day (*Jeonseung ginyeomil*), 9 September - DPRK Foundation Day (*Gonghwaguk changgeonil*), 10 October - Party Foundation Day (*Dangchanggeonil*), and 27 December - Constitution Day (*Heonbeopjeol*). There is also a Constitution Day (*Jeheonjeol*), on 17 July in the South, but of course, very different in nature. On the other hand, there are five national holidays in the South which are of no relevance to the North. These are, for obvious reasons, Buddha's Birthday (*Seokgatansinil*) on 8 April according to the Lunar Calendar and Christmas Day (*Seongtanjeol*) on 25 December. The same goes, under different circumstances, of course, for Memorial Day (*Hyeonchungil*), 6 June. Regarding the other two remaining South Korean holidays you may think they could be celebrated in the North, too: 1 March (*Samiljeol*), is the day which commemorates the biggest uprising against

¹² The names for this holiday differ from time to time: In the South it is officially referred to as *Sinjeong*, a term which in the North is not used at all. There they use *Seol*, which in the South is normally used for the New Year's Day according to the lunar calendar.

¹³ Here, too, the names differ: In South Korea the official term is the poetic *Gwangbokjeol* ("Day when the light was regained"), whereas in North Korea it is just officially called *Minjok haebang ginyeomil* ("National Liberation Commemoration Day").

¹⁴ Literally that means "Day in commemoration of the Great Leader comrade Kim Jong Il's birthday".

¹⁵ *Taeyangjeol* literally means „Day of the Sun“.

Japanese colonial rule in 1919. In North Korea they can not establish this day as an official holiday, because the anti-Japanese activities of Kim Il Sung are considered far more important, although the March 1 Movement is not denied completely. The fifth one is 3 October (*Gaechonjeol*), the National Holiday in South Korea. It commemorates the legendary foundation of the first Korean state *Gojoseon* (Ancient Korea) by *Dangun*, who according to legend was born as the son of the Heavenly God and a woman-turned bear, on 3 October 2333 BC. As it has been established as the National Holiday of the Republic of Korea, it is, of course, impossible for North Korea to follow that example. In 1993, when the situation in North Korea began to get worse, they claimed to have found the bones of *Dangun* and his wife in Gangdong-gun in the outskirts of Pyongyang and in 1994 erected a giant tomb to enshrine the bones there. Of course, no respectable academic in the ROK or anywhere else in the world would support this ridiculous fairytale, and the only reason for North Korea to stage that comedy was to prove that Pyongyang and thereby *Juche joseon*, (the present North Korean regime,) is in the direct line of the founding fathers of the Korean nation, and therefore their only legitimate representative or heir apparent. But, nevertheless one could think that there is at least the chance for *Dangun* to become a symbol of common identity between North and South.

Despite this, as we have seen, there is not much shared cultural identity to see any longer, regarding state holidays. However if you include the so-called “folklore holidays” (*Minsok myeongjeol*) – which are not official state holidays in the north – you do get some more common points: They are the Lunar New Year’s Day¹⁶, *Hansik*, that is 5 April, the 105th day after *Dongji* (winter solstice)¹⁷, and last but not least *Chuseok* or *Hangawi*, which is the Korean Thanksgiving, celebrated from the 14th to 16th day of the 8th Lunar month.

¹⁶ Again, the terms differ slightly: In the North it is called *Eumryeokseol* or *Seolmyeongjeol*, whereas in the South it is simply *Seol* or *Seollal*.

¹⁷ *Hansik* has been celebrated as Arbor Day in South Korea. In North Korea, Arbor Day had been celebrated on 6 April since 1971, but was transferred to 2 March in 1999. In the South it is called *Singmokil*, in the North *Siksujeol*.

Chuseok and *Seol*, which are the greatest national holidays in Korea, were abolished by Kim Il Sung in May 1967. The reason given was that feudal remnants had to be eradicated, and that the rites and customs practised on these days deviated from the people's socialist lifestyle.¹⁸ It is no coincidence that this was exactly the time when North Korea was vehemently pushing forward their *Juche* ideology in all spheres of society. But after the opening of the South-North-Dialogue in 1972, the restrictions regarding *Chuseok* were loosened.¹⁹ For example, people were allowed to visit the graves of their ancestors in the neighbourhood of their place of residence, and there was a strict order by the authorities not to waste food when practising ancestral rites of any kind. This official North Korean attitude towards the traditional holidays did not change much far until the second half of the 1980s. For example, a monograph from 1986²⁰ describes the so-called *Mingan myeongjeol* ("civil" holidays, as distinct from the *Gukga myeongjeol* – "state" holidays)²¹, classified by seasons. The descriptions are all in the past tense which already implies or at least indicates that these customs are not (or should not be) practised any longer.²² For example, the "great bow" (*Keun jeol*) in front of the elder and the giving of "New Year's money" (*Jeolgap*) are described as "fabrications by the sham feudal-Confucian morale"²³ and the full moon rites on *Jeongwol daeboreum*²⁴ and the praying for a rich harvest are condemned as "absurd superstition", due to the farmers' "lack of scientific knowledge".²⁵ The authors of that monograph summarize three points, which they consider positive about the traditional holidays: First, the

¹⁸ See *Bukhan 365 il* (North Korea 365 Days). *Bukhanmunje yeonguso*, Seoul 2004, p.16.

¹⁹ See *Bukhan yeongam* (Yonhap Yearbook North Korea) 2004. Yonhap News Agency, Seoul 2004, p. 210.

²⁰ *Joseonui minsok* (Korean Folklore), by Kim Nae-chang and Seon Hui-chang, published by *Sahoegwahak chulpansa*, Pyeongyang 1986.

²¹ The latest *Joseon minsok sajeon* (Korean Folklore Dictionary), *Gwahak baekwasajeon chulpansa*, Pyeongyang 2004, does not give the headword *Mingan myeongjeol*. Instead, they are referred to as *Minsok myeongjeol*.

²² In their monograph *Joseon minsokhak* (Korean Folklore), published by Kim Il Sung University *chulpansa* in 1980, the authors Seon Hui-chang, Ri Je-o and Jo Dae-il stated that in Korea "these holidays existed until the end of the feudal society" (p. 85).

²³ *Joseonui minsok*, p. 221.

²⁴ This is lunar 15 January and was „revitalized“ as a "folklore holiday" in 2003.

²⁵ *Joseonui minsok*, p. 221.

celebrations fostered the farmers' productivity and were a necessary form of relaxation at that time. Second, these holidays reflect the traditional Korean ethics and elaborate manners of harmonious life within the village community. And third, these holidays provided good opportunities to practise traditional Korean sports and games.²⁶ But apart from that, the whole text emphasized the backwardness of these *Mingan myeongjeol* and the fact that they are all pervaded by superstitious elements which have to be rooted out by any means possible.

But at the end of the 1980s things began to change. In 1988 – obviously under the influence of the Seoul Olympics – *Chuseok* was introduced again, followed in 1989 by Lunar New Year's Day, *Hansik* and also *Dano*²⁷ and *Jeongwol daeboreum*. After 1992, *Hansik* was abolished again as a free day, on the grounds that it was allegedly a Chinese custom. The biggest change was the reintroduction of Lunar New Year's Day. In 2003 it was officially announced that from now on the Lunar New Year should be given more importance than the Solar New Year. It was, of course, a special direction by Kim Jong Il, who also instructed that *Dano* and *Chuseok* should be called by the old Korean names *Surinal* and *Hangawi*.²⁸ It was also declared that from 2003, the North Korean citizens would get three days off for the Lunar New Year's festival – a fact which has to be doubted very much. My personal experience of life in North Korea in the 1970s and 80s has shown that there were normally only two days in the course of a whole year which were really free days for people to spend with their families: They were 2 January (the day after New Year's Day) and 16 April (the day after the Great Leader's birthday), although they had to go to work on the following Sunday to make up for it. A holiday in North Korea does not automatically mean a free day, but a day where you have to go to your workplace as usual, even if it is not work but to take part in the official

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 230-31.

²⁷ This is the traditional Korean spring holiday on lunar 5 May, also called *Surinal*.

²⁸ See *Bukhan yeongam* 2004, p. 210.

celebrations and rituals. And these rituals even influence the traditional holidays, as one can see from the typical wording: “Today our people celebrate this day according to the aesthetic taste of the time (*Sidaejeok migame matge*).”²⁹ The latest *Joseon minsok sajeon* (Korean Folklore Dictionary) still uses this formula, but apart from that there is an enormous difference compared to the 1986 monograph. The 2004 dictionary gives definitions on *Seol*, *Jeongwol daeboreum* and *Hangawi* which are quite objective and positive. The usual negative descriptions with words and expressions such as “superstition”, “feudal exploiters”, “mendacious Confucian morale” and so on are missing entirely. And it definitely says, for example, about *Seol*: “Today our people have fixed Lunar New Year as a state holiday and significantly celebrate it as a folklore holiday.”³⁰ And about *Jeongwol daeboreum*: “Today our people celebrate *Jeongwol daeboreum* as a traditional folklore holiday.”³¹ The lengthiest description on the present state of commemorating these days is about *Hangawi*: “Today our people celebrate *Hangawi* happily. When the day comes the whole family first of all visits the graves of the ancestors. They weed and tend the graves and lay down a bunch of flowers in front of them, or prepare a simple dinner-table. In memory of the deceased they pay their respects or take a bow. As a holiday food, like in the old times, several sorts of rice-cake, e. g. *Songpyeon*, *Sirutteok* and *Chaltteok* are prepared from the new harvest and eaten. And playing folklore games, they celebrate according to the aesthetic taste of the time.”³² Of course, the way these holidays are celebrated in the North still differs a lot compared to the South. This is not a surprise after 25 years of neglect and prohibition. It will also take some time to overcome the material shortages which still do not allow most of the people to prepare the proper holiday food, for example. But one can say that re-establishing the “folklore holidays” was a

²⁹ For example, see the definition of *Hangawi* (*Chuseok*) in the latest *Joseon minsok sajeon* (Korean Folklore Dictionary), Pyeongyang 2004, p. 314.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 212.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 254.

³² *ibid.*, p. 314.

positive move in the right direction of trying to keep up at least a minimum of cultural identity between North and South. The importance attached by the North Korean leadership to these folklore holidays is also shown by the fact that on 15 February 2003 a set of 5 stamps and 1 sheet of stamps was issued on that topic, showing *Jeongwol daeboreum*, *Hangawi* and *Surinal*. And on 22 January 2004, a “Lunar New Year’s stamp” (*Seolmyeongjeol*) was issued for the first time, in addition to the regular “New Year’s stamp” (*Saehaereul chukhahamnida*) which has been issued on 1 January each year since 1977. Surprisingly, the 2004 folklore dictionary does not mention *Surinal* (or *Dano*) at all. The reasons for that are unclear, but it seems that the official guideline is to concentrate on *Seol*, *Jeongwol daeboreum* and *Hangawi*, which is also reflected in the general definitions of holidays (*Myeongjeol*) and folklore holidays (*Minsok myeongjeol*).³³

To sum up, I would again like to raise the question of whether there is any shared cultural identity between North and South, and if so, what prospects might arise out of that for a future reunification.

If you understand cultural identity in the sense of preserving the same traditional elements in art, architecture, handicrafts and so on, one can state that there still is a certain basic identity. Although the approach in North Korea is not as constant as in the South, but more an undulating movement depending on political necessities, at the moment the tendency is more positive compared to a few years ago. That means, the question could be answered with some optimism. But if you understand cultural identity in the sense of the whole complex of the forms or ways of life, the answer cannot be anything but pessimistic. Considering the so very different social forms, this is not really surprising. Both societies in the North and in the South are too much determined by extremes, which in fact hampers the process of rapprochement. Luckily enough, since the implementation of Kim Dae-jung’s Sunshine Policy the relations between both

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 134 and 150.

sides have been developing positively in many areas. The Geumgangsan tourism project initiated by Hyundai founder Jeong Ju-yeong has become a symbol of South-North reconciliation and co-operation. After the Pyeongyang summit between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong Il and the Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000, there has been an enormous upswing in the relations, also on the non-governmental level. The problem here is that in North Korea there practically do not exist any NGOs at all, so a South Korean NGO representative will always face a North Korean official. This is only one aspect of the many problems regarding South-North co-operation. The government of President Roh Moo-hyun has been continuing this policy under the slogan “Peace and Prosperity”. The further enhancement of exchange and co-operation is the only way to foster cultural identity between both sides, thereby increasing the chances for a future reunification. Mutual economic co-operation, for example the Gaeseong Industrial Complex, makes a decisive contribution to that goal. Such projects are not only of economic significance, but – and may be this is even more important in view of a future unification – they act as enormous multipliers spreading ways of life and forms of everyday culture, that means they contribute to cultural identity. The development of the relations between East and West Germany in the 1970s and 80s has also proven the fact, that direct exchange between the people is the only way to create a climate which can ultimately lead to unification.

It has always been the people who are the sustainers of culture, and for politics culture is just a tool. So the decisive thing about the question of cultural identity is the people’s attitude towards culture, and this, in the Korean case, gives us much hope for the future.

Last but not least, a very short remark about an important field of cultural identity, that is language. In the 1980s, there were some linguists, especially in East Germany, who claimed that language in both parts of Germany had developed into two different variants of German. In Korea, the situation is far

more serious due to the decade-long separation. But also in this case, mutual exchange brings about positive effects and contributes towards the preservation and restoration of cultural identity. Compiling common dictionaries is an essential point in this context. And I can say from my own experience: I have never had any substantial problems in communicating with Koreans in the South as well as in the North, so I am convinced that in case of unification the language problem will be solved automatically.