

## Thoughts on Reunification by a Historian of Praxis : Kang Man-Kil's 'Reunification Nationalism' And 'Theory of Equitable Reunification'\*

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### Abstract

Kang Man-Kil is the first historian to position overcoming of division and reunification of the Korean peninsula as the most important scholarly topic. The overall structure of his historiography is constructed of: first, gaining a penetrative historical perspective on the Age of National Division, and second, establishing a new historical framework that can overcome division. These two themes can be encapsulated into his term, 'reunification nationalism'. 'Reunification nationalism' is the rightful guiding ideology for the Korean society, contributing to overcoming division and reunifying the nation. Kang's reunification nationalism is meaningful in three ways: 1. It is an 'alternative historiography', in which the national united front movement based on negotiations between left and right wings since the colonial period is seen as the mainstream of national history. 2. It recognizes the entire Peninsula as one national unit and it is an 'anti-divisionist historical perception' that considers all Peninsula citizens to be agents of historical development. 3. All Peninsula citizens are seen to constitute one historical and cultural community, and it is meaningful as a 'reunification theory' based on peaceful, reciprocal and equitable methods. In sum, the above-mentioned three aspects of reunification nationalism form the basis of the details of Kang Man-Kil's reunification nationalism, which is his 'theory of equitable reunification'.

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## 1. Issues Raised by Kang Man-Kil: Presentness and Praxis of Historiography

In order to justify their rule over Joseon, Japanese imperialists asserted a colonial view of history. In particular, their Theory of Stalled History and Theory of Dependence maintain that history of Korea was unable to develop autonomously but rather through intervention and influence from foreign forces. According to these theories, because Korea had not made any social development necessary to modernize, colonial rule by Japan was inevitable. On the other hand, the Theory of Innate Development opposes this kind of perspective, and instead argues that history of Korea has been progressing autonomously and was internally driven, and that its history was not stalled but was continuously developing. For example, a self-driven engine to power modernization already existed inside Joseon society therefore it would have been able to modernize itself without the influence of Western capitalism. This Theory of Innate Development has been identified as an ‘anti-colonial view of history’, becoming the mainstream of Korean modern historical analysis since mid to late 1960’s. However, historians following this trend soon began to diverge.

Kang Man-Kil criticizes that the ‘anti-colonial view of history’ based on the Theory of Innate Development was eventually absorbed by a ‘self-reliant nationalist view of history’ of the Park Jung Hee regime. According to Kang, Park’s self-reliant nationalist view of history aimed to justify its weak legitimacy by viewing North Korea as instigator of national division while arguing that, from a national historical perspective, historical legitimacy lies with South Korea. It is therefore a divisive view of history. Kang believes this kind of historical interpretation dismisses class conflict within a nation to something outside historical boundaries, and simply holds onto the abstract and conflict-ridden idea of ‘one nation’. In other words, Park Jung Hee regime’s version of an ‘anti-colonial view of history’ linked to the ‘self-reliant

nationalist view of history' rendered the reality of the divided Peninsula abstract and thus has degraded itself into a government-led view of history emphasizing absolute unity within a divided state (Shin, Ju-Baek 2014. 222).

Kang Man-Kil raises the issue that such ideologically deformed anti-colonial view of history turned a blind eye to the stern reality of division - the core problem being the oblivion to 'presentness of historiography'. He criticized historians of the time for focusing their research only on facts from the 'past' irrelevant to the realistic needs of the time, while avoiding assessing and criticizing the 'present'. For example, according to Kang, all the main trends of Korean modern history studies - from nationalist history to socio-economic history to evidential history - were inattentive to the needs of the era and have thus become 'forms of pure history studies' (Kang, Man-Kil 1978. 38-41). Against this backdrop, Kang sought a view of history that focuses on the 'presentness' based on the real needs of the times, not one detached from or immersed in reality.

What exactly does Kang mean by 'real needs of the times', which he points out as the starting point of history studies? He raises the need to overcome the Age of National Division. According to Kang, the real significance of studying history can only be found when the study is able to identify the contemporary era as an 'Age of National Division' and can reflect the yearning of the divided people to reunify - an imperative in this Age of National Division. Relevance of history studies lies not simply in diagnosing and assessing reality as said by E. H. Carr, but rather in going further to engage in scholarly effort to overcome the issues faced by reality of that particular era. In this sense, Kang believes the role of history studies is to reform reality and create a better future, and is thus 'a discipline that is inevitably more progressive than other disciplines' (Kang, Man-Kil 2013. 329).

In this regard, Kang Man-Kil's historical perspective is sometimes referred to as an 'anti-divisionist view of history', in the sense he argues historiography has an important mission in face of the reality as a divided nation. He is the first historian to position overcoming of division and reunification of the Korean peninsula as the most important scholarly topic. The mission of history studies is to interpret reality as a prison brought by division, to emancipate this reality and to establish a 'reunified nation state'. Therefore, it is possible to say Kang

Man-Kil's reunification discourse is composed of two axes: first, gaining a penetrative historical perspective on the Age of National Division, and second, establishing a new historical framework that can overcome division. Kang's anti-divisionist historical view first appeared in *Historical Consciousness in an Age of National Division* (1978), and then continuously elaborated in *Theory on the History of Korea's Nationalist Movement* (1985), *Historical Consciousness in the Era of Reunification Movement* (1990) and in *History is the Progress of Ideal's Realization* (2002).

Against this background, this paper will perform three tasks. First, it will look into the basic attitude and perspective that constitute Kang's reunification discourse, including an analysis into the stance and tasks of historians and/or history studies under division, and a discussion on 'reunification nationalism', which forms the ideological basis for overcoming division. Second, based on the former, I will reorganize Kang Man-Kil's reunification discourse into a few core theses. At the same time, I will point out both the significance and limitations of Kang's views on reunification. Last, I will make some proposals that can take Kang's positive contributions further.

## 2. 'Theory on the Age of National Division' and Reinterpretation of Korean Modern History

Kang argues for a historiography as a means of praxis based on concrete present reality - one that is neither detached from nor engrossed in the reality that we live in. The 'presentness' and 'praxis' form the basic stance and attitude of Kang's idea of history. Thus, according to Kang, the 'issue of division', which the Korean Peninsula presently faces, should be the precondition of historians' stance and attitude. His book *Historical Consciousness in an Age of National Division*, which was his first work to raise such ideas, is an internal criticism within history studies that historians have failed to identify present reality as an 'anti-historical era of national division'.

The main theme of *Historical Consciousness in an Age of National Division*

is encapsulated in the phrase, 'Age of National Division'. Instead of the phrase 'post-liberation era', commonly used at the time by other historians, Kang uses 'Age of National Division'. Kang's objective definition of 'Age of National Division' is "An era when national division has become so full-fledged that even after a painful civil war, extreme conflicts - unprecedented anywhere in the world - have risen in all areas including ideology, military and foreign policy, and hopes of establishing a reunified nation state seem too far away whereas the regime of division continues to become more consolidated" (Kang, Man-Kil 1978. 14). However, the main idea of the Theory of the Age of National Division is not simply designating and describing the historical characteristics of a certain era. 'Historical consciousness' to overcome the challenges posed by the contemporary era has to be the basis of that designation. Therefore, the Theory on Age of National Division must be understood as a combination of objectively designating a certain era is an 'Age of National Division' and the 'historical consciousness' attempting to overcome the challenges of that era.

'Historical awareness' articulated by Kang can be summarized as the conscious will of historical agents to establish and strive for a rightful direction for historical development through an acute analysis and self-reflection. That is why, in order to emphasize the relevance of the situation that has to be historically overcome, he designates the present era as an 'Age of National Division' as a basis to motivate praxis. "National history during the first half of the 20th century was when liberation from colonial rule was the priority. However, the post-liberation period during the latter half of the century must be interpreted as an era when priority of national history lay in surmounting national division and establishing a reunified nation state. Based on such historical awareness, there is no other way than to label this period the 'Age of National Division' or 'Era of Reunification Movement'" (Kang, Man-Kil 1978. 14-15). By designating a period in such a way, Kang calls for vigilance against taking division for granted and becoming complacent. This designation objectively recognizes this is an era we need to overcome, and is based on a strong historical consciousness to seek concrete ways of doing so. In other words, the essence of 'Theory of the Age of National Division' is basically an emphasis on presentness and praxis of historiography.

Nonetheless, Kang's emphasis on the presentness and praxis of historiography is sometimes criticized as being obsessive (Noh, Tae-Don 1991, 26). However, Kang's Theory of the Age of National Division contains quite desperate contemplations as a historian witnessing the reality of the division through events such as the South-North Korea Joint Communiqué of July 4th 1972 and the declaration of the 'Yushin Regime' three months later. In fact, the significance of the Theory of the Age of National Division lies in the fact that it sought to overcome divisionism within humanities and that it brought the issues of division and reunification to the fore of history studies (Kim, Sung-Min and Park, Young-Kyun 2010, 511). But if historiography during Age of National Division is to bring existing reality into its limelight and if it is to reflect the real needs of the times, then 'historiography during the Age of National Division' inevitably becomes an 'anti-divisionist historiography'. How then can historians come up with a concrete methodology for such anti-divisionist historiography? Kang proposes two directions.

Kang asserts that anti-divisionist historiography can be articulated by rediscovering historical facts that can contribute to building a reunified nation state, and by establishing a high-level reunification-oriented perspective of history, based on such rediscovery (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 364). The methodology of the former involves proving the historical fact that the national liberation movement under colonialism was not simply divided between left and right wings, but was also an incessant process of attempting to form one united front. The latter involves proving that such anti-colonial united front movement went beyond the colonial period and continued during the Age of National Division, and thereby theorizing the history of the national liberation movement not as being fragmented, but being a united front movement between the Left and the Right to build a reunified nation state. In sum, Kang tries to positively position the anti-colonial national liberation movement within a reconstructed flow of a national liberation movement that is a Left-Right joint united front movement rather than one based on division between the two forces. Coming up with a 'reunification-oriented historical awareness', in which this flow continues its legacy even during the Age of National Division in the form of 'a movement to build a reunified nation state', is the task of Kang's historiography.

Therefore, Kang's anti-divisionist view of history requires analyzing the period

of Japanese colonialism, which is the primary cause of division. However, Kang views that, in South Korean history, the socialist movement under colonialism was too narrowly interpreted. Rather than being seen as a part of the national liberation movement or a part of Korean modern history, the history of the socialist movement was considered narrowly, only in and of itself. This kind of interpretation emanated from the view that the national liberation movement under imperialism was divided between left and right wings. Such perspective is true not only in South Korean history studies, but also in North Korea, where all other socialist movements aside from the anti-colonial armed struggles of Kim Il-Sung are excluded from history. Exclusion of and animosity towards the socialist movement were common features of both Koreas, manifesting yet another facet of the competition between the two regimes, who both selectively interpret the colonial history in order to justify the legitimacy of each system. On the other hand, Kang tries to reinstate the socialist movement under colonialism as part of the history of national liberation movement led by the fierce struggles of the colonized people. Once again, he argues that the national liberation movement was not fragmented between left and right wings, but rather developed through a continuous process of forming a united front between the two forces.

For example, according to Kang, the Shanghai Provisional Government was ‘from the onset, a government jointly set up by left and right wings’ and the Shingan Association movement was the ‘domestic version of a movement outside of Korea to establish a single party in Korea’. Maintaining that the ‘Korea United Front Alliance Movement’ and the ‘Korea National Revolutionary Party’ were also ceaseless attempts to form a left-right united front (Kang, Man-Kil 2003, 19-25), Kang implements research to substantiate the development of a national united front under colonialism. He goes further to say that the united front movement was not limited to the colonial period but continued for three years after liberation, in the left-right joint movement and the movement for inter-Korea negotiations. The reason why Kang emphasizes the united front movement is to show that the history of the national liberation movement was not filled with confrontation and conflict, as taken for granted in a divided nation, but rather one in which a new historical tradition and consciousness aiming for integration, unity and a united

front can be discovered. Ultimately, Kang's anti-divisionist historiography is articulated as 'reunification nationalism'.

### 3. 'Divisionist Statism' and 'Reunification Nationalism'

According to Yoon Hae-Dong, most nationalist history studies interpret Korean modern history as a journey towards establishing a modern nation state, and consider Korean modern history as a nation-building process that can be completed only with reunification (Yoon, Hae-Dong 2007, 24). As Yoon points out, Kang Man-Kil leads such trend of reunification-oriented nationalist historiography. This kind of historiography is articulated through Kang's concept of 'reunification nationalism'. In Kang's view, the national united front movement fighting for liberation from Japan progressed, in the post-liberation period, into a movement to establish a reunified nation state, and then after the Korean War until now, further evolved into the peaceful reunification movement to overcome division and build a reunified nation state (Kang, Man-Kil 2010, 16). In other words, nationalist ideology forms the basis of the reunification movement during the Age of National Division, just as it did for the anti-colonial national liberation movement. Kang believes that nationalism is the guiding ideology in the process of fighting colonialism to attain liberation, and in fighting division to attain reunification.

Generally, a 'nation' is considered to be a primordial group or entity that for long has shared one language, culture, set of customs, history and kinship, based on which people of that nation has the right to their own state (Wehler 2009, 67). The idea that a nation is a fixed entity is referred to as primordialism. There is no denying that Kang also leans towards primordialism in his view of the nation in light of his notion, "A nation (*minjok*) is not only a uniform political and economic community, but also a community formed from natural conditions such as race and landform, and social conditions such as language and cultural tradition. It is more natural and primary than citizens (*gukmin*)" (Kang, Man-Kil 1978, 35-36). He is also in line with the traditional nationalist stance in arguing that the history of the Korean Peninsula in the 21st century must aim to establish a



reunified nation state.

Limitations and side-effects of traditional nationalism's historical functions need no explanation. The historical manifestations that appeared when nationalism converged with statism has already been sufficiently proven. As a result, in face of today's rapid globalization, post-nationalism is gaining more ground, with wider recognition that nationalism will soon disappear. In this light, Yoon criticizes the way Kang combines reunification and nationalism in his anti-divisionist history, saying that this combination will eventually lead to a mixture of racism, statism and collectivism (Yoon, Hae-Dong 2007, 271-272).

However, I believe this kind of criticism towards Kang's reunification discourse is far-fetched. Kang also realizes the dangers of nationalism, as illustrated by his detailed explanations into its negative aspects several times in his publications. He agrees that, externally, nationalism can converge with the idea of invading others, and internally, with oppression and exploitation of members of society. There is also a high possibility that nationalism may evolve into retrogressionism, ethnocentrism, heroist interpretation of history, statism or confrontation (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 17).

However, at the same time, Kang maintains one should not overlook the fact that nationalism has a strong defining power over reality, particularly on the Korean Peninsula, with its socio-historical conditions that led it to have a strong national consciousness for a long time. Also, nationalism becomes a desperate necessity to the people in a divided nation. In other words, the reason why Kang highlights his idea of reunification nationalism in the process of establishing an anti-divisionist historical perspective is to emphasize nationalism's power of praxis in overcoming division. Therefore, Kang argues for a particular form of nationalism needed during the Age of National Division, i.e., 'reunification nationalism'.

Here, Kang discusses 'open nationalism' as a way of enriching the definition of nationalism. Kang's 'reunification nationalism' as open nationalism can be summarized as follows. First, reunification nationalism has to be holistic and encompass both Koreas in the process of building a reunified nation state (Kang, Man-Kil 1978, 24). For Kang, nationalism is not just an ideology. He also places importance on its specific historical functions. For example, the major task of

nationalism under colonial rule was ‘liberation’ and ‘post-liberation state-building’, while in the Age of National Division, it is ‘building a reunified nation state’ in continuation of the former. Kang believes that, after liberation, the two Koreas each built nation states that were both ‘divided nation states’ not a ‘reunified nation state’. In this regard, nationalism itself, in a sense, led to division.

As a strategy to gain ideological hegemony and legitimacy over each regime, each divided state appropriated nationalism and limited it within the boundaries of either the south or north of the Military Demarcation Line. Whereas nationalism during colonialism was ‘nationalism of resistance’, surpassing the left vs. right ideological conflict and forming a united front against Japanese colonialism, nationalism in the Age of National Division has been degraded into a ‘statist nationalism’ that only produces exclusivity towards each other in order to secure rule over each regime. This, according to Kang, is ‘divisionist statism’. Divisionist statism is “historical perception that accepts and supports the antagonism, exclusivity and supremacy of power exercised by one divided state power over the other” (Kang, Man-Kil 2002, 215). He goes further to say, “It is a form of historical perception implicitly based on the idea that division is unavoidable and natural” (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 15). Kang asserts that in order to bring about reunification, one must overcome such divisionist statism and instead strive for a holistic nationalism that covers the entire Peninsula.

Secondly, reunification nationalism, while based on nationalism, should be open enough to merge with various other values. Kang views nationalism as a secondary ideology that has to combine with another ideology. For instance, the nationalist movement from the colonial times to the post-liberation period was not driven by a single ideology or principle. Rather, it was combined with the ‘anti-Japan movement’, ‘movement for national reunification’ or the ‘pro-democracy movement’. He therefore opposes reducing Korean nationalism to mere ethnic nationalism, and calls for a strict self-criticism into Korea’s traditional nationalism.

The premise of traditional nationalism is problematic in two ways. First, traditional nationalism negates the stark contradictions existing inside the nation. For nationalism to head in the right direction, its historical function should not be ‘hiding the contradictions within a nation’ but rather ‘advocating the rights of

all people of the nation'. Nationalism in Korea's modern and contemporary history was rooted in ethnicity as a way of resisting invasion from other countries, with strong links to ethnocentrism and exclusivity. However, Kang argues that reunification nationalism has to be civil nationalism, based on principles of national sovereignty and democracy (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 7).

Thirdly, reunification nationalism should not be past-oriented or retrogressive, endowing special status to the 'past', but rather should be future-oriented. Usually, nationalism tends to idealize a certain time in the past and seeks to go back. But Kang is strongly against such retrogressionism because not only does such attitude blur scientific perspective in history, it may also bring about detachment from political, social and cultural realities, leading one to become anti-historical and go against the current. Thus, according to Kang, the glory of a nation's historical experience lies not in the past, but in the proactive attitude of striving for such glory in the present and the future.

An example of this future-oriented nationalism can be found in his discussion of peace-oriented nationalism. Kang acknowledges that in 21st century world history, the powers of and the need for nation states are weakening under capitalist globalization. Under these circumstances, Kang tries to overcome the mismatch between this reality of world history and the needs of national historical experience, not through a past-oriented nationalism, but through a dialectic development between universality of world history and specificity of national history. In short, reunification of the two divided states into one nation state will eliminate the threat of war, contributing both to peace in East Asia and the world at large.

#### **4. Core Themes of Kang Man-Kil's Reunification Discourse**

##### **a) 'Theory of Korean Peninsula's Geo-political Position' and 'Theory of Equal Reunification'**

The above-mentioned three aspects of reunification nationalism form the basis of the details of Kang Man-Kil's reunification nationalism. However, a person's

theoretical framework aiming to resolve a certain issue cannot remain unchanged at all times. Kang's contemplations on reunification also evolved according to the times and personal experience. For example, in Kang's reunification discourse of 1990's, his main ideas were both 'theory of expanding 3rd party political force as agents of reunification<sup>1)</sup>' (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 55-56) and the 'theory of Korean Peninsula's geo-political position', however, after 2000's, the latter became more prominent. Ultimately, for Kang, the geo-political position of the Korean Peninsula is the cause of division as well as the methodology for reunification (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 451).

Kang views the primary cause of the nation's division to be the geo-political position of the Korean Peninsula and the direct impact of the Cold War between US and USSR. In particular, since the Peninsula is located in the center where the continental forces of China and USSR collide with the maritime forces of Japan and US, reunification dominated by one side is impossible. Furthermore, division has become protracted precisely because of the continued alliance between South Korea, US and Japan on one hand, and North Korea, China and USSR on the other. Such is the essence of Kang's theory of Korean Peninsula's geo-political position. Thus, Kang ascertains, "This is the time we need to galvanize national wisdom to establish a unified nation state that, by using its geo-political location as its advantage, can play the role of a buffer or neutral zone in international politics" (Kang, Man-Kil 2009, 256).

The core of Kang's geo-political position theory is that reunification on the Korean Peninsula can neither be attained by war nor absorption. According to Kang, in light of the international political circumstances surrounding the Peninsula with its certain geo-political position, the only way it can reunify is not by being incorporated into any one side, but rather by cooperating with both of the two confronting regimes of alliances while at the same time building and maintaining trust and coordination between the two Koreas. The two Koreas can then decrease

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1) Contrary to the idea at the time that agents of reunification are the 'nation (*minjok*)' – a notion distorted and produced by governing ideology – Kang appoints the people (*minjung*) as agents of reunification. The concept of people used here, is 'people in a broad sense' connected to the idea of the nation (*minjok*) mediated by democracy. Kang considers the people as agents of both historical transformation as well as of reunification, and seeks to expand the concept.

the strength of their ties with the neighboring powers once trust and coordination between the two have reached a certain level. So the important challenge is to root down peace and coexistence through protracted patience and compromise. The reunification theory based on the Peninsula's geo-political position is 'theory of equitable reunification'. Although Kang explains his reunification ideas through various expressions such as 'equitable', 'reciprocal', 'self-reliant', 'gradual', 'neutral', 'peaceful' and 'negotiable', they can be encapsulated into his 'theory of equitable reunification'. Kang's equitable reunification is indeed 'equitable' in the sense that reunification should neither be based on war nor absorption. 'Equitability' is the 'overarching principle of reunification' and 'negotiation' is the 'specific mode and process of realizing that principle' (Kang, Man-Kil 2006, 164-168). The starting point of this theory is that a method of reunification unique to the Peninsula has to be sought. In other words, as Kang himself explains, the reason why he studies into the left-right united front national liberation movement, based on which he tries to rewrite the history of the movement, is ultimately to overcome the divisionist historical awareness and instead to enable a peaceful, equitable and negotiated reunification between the two Koreas.

After looking into the German reunification process, Kang concludes that reunification through absorption should not be applied mainly because a 'relationship of imbalance between the conqueror and the conquered' will be formed through the process. Such relationship could appear more prominently on the Korean Peninsula compared to Germany since Korea went through a war. If a German-style reunification is repeated on the Peninsula, then political, economic, social and cultural discriminations between the North and South could prevail for a long time, and due to historical conditions brought by the civil war, side-effects of reunification could prolong. Thus, the most important task is to forge ways to do away with confrontation and animosity in favor of a neutral, equitable and reciprocal reunification. In short, the core of 'theory on equitable reunification' is to avoid enforcing the lifestyle, mindset, system and ideology of one side through war or absorption, and instead to promote a self-reliant, gradual and peaceful reunification.

As such, Kang's equitable reunification theory manifests its basic perspective

as reunification discourse based on humanities, in the sense that it is a ‘historical awareness that goes beyond division to include the entire Peninsula in its national history’. Unlike social sciences, which study and establish detailed, technical and institutional methodologies, he argues for a ‘humanities to play a certain role’, to establish a new historical perception contributing to reunification from a universal and macro perspective (Kang, Man-Kil 2000, 193-194). However, it is precisely at this point the limitations of Kang’s theory on equitable reunification can be found.

First of all, Kang emphasizes only the geo-political conflict between the continental and the maritime forces as the objective situation surrounding modern Korea, and does not deeply concern himself with the historical sufferings left by the colonial rule and division. Of course, Kang does consider the direct cause of nation’s division to be colonization by Japan, but he approaches the issue only as a matter of historical cause and effect. So he does not place much importance on the fact that division was the direct result of colonialism and that colonization caused various wounds and problems perpetuating division. Rather, he seems to point towards geo-political position of the Peninsula as the cause of both the division and its perpetuation. In fact, in Kang’s reunification discourse after 2000’s, his geo-political position theory seems to take up majority of his analysis into the cause and consolidation of division.<sup>2)</sup> Too much focus on geo-political positioning can lead to fatalism, which Kang himself argues against. However, it is highly likely that he may, albeit unintentionally, end up supporting such fatalism by not considering enough the wounds from colonialism and antagonism that have deeply scarred our lives.

Secondly, Kang’s equitable reunification theory remains an abstract and imperative call to recover homogeneity between the two Koreas. Kang objectively recognizes the heterogeneity and differences between the North and South, and the core of his reunification discourse is reunification as a process of recovering

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2) Publications that deal with overcoming division and prospects for reunification, such as *Historical Consciousness in an Age of National Division*, *Consideration of Unified Korea with Man-Kil Kang*, *What Shall We Reunify the Nation?*, *History of the Pain from the Division and Prospect of Unification*, raise the point that the tension and clash between the maritime and the continental forces were core reasons behind the historical process of ‘division – Korean War – consolidation of division’.

national homogeneity by equitably and objectively narrowing the heterogeneity and the differences. He maintains that equitable reunification is the effort to recover national homogeneity by surmounting the political, economic, social and cultural differences between the two Koreas. However, the dangers of a reunification discourse supporting traditional homogeneity of a nation are evident. Emphasizing homogeneity can, on one hand, be a tool forging a fixed self-identity, but can also lead to a 'dogmatic logic' that excludes anything different. Such call for a primordialist homogeneity may lead to uniformism that conforms all differences in opinion, tendency and behavior into one framework, as well as to exclusive ego-centrism that enforces one's standard on everyone else. Therefore, the emphasis on homogeneity can directly contradict Kang's idea of open nationalism and is far from putting reunification into practice..

#### **b) Reunification as 'Completion of Modernization': Expanding the Concept of 'Modernity' and Its Merger with Progressive, Optimist and Teleological Views of History**

According to Kang Man-Kil, the core task for Korean modern history is gaining independent sovereignty and modernization, and such 'completion of modernization' is reached when the Peninsula has overcome division and reunified. In this sense, 'modernization' is both the starting point as well as the goal of Kang's reunification discourse. However, Kang's 'theory on reunification of Korean Peninsula as a process of completing modernization' has been criticized for falling into the modernization trap, or 'modernization-centrism'. Critics have said that Western concept of modernity, characterized by building of a nation state and the birth of the citizen, has been equated excessively with the modernization process in Korea, and that highest normative priority has been placed on this kind of modernization. Such criticism is linked to three debated ways of understanding Korean modern history.

There are three ways of interpreting the Japanese colonial period in Korean modern history - 'Theory of Exploitation Through Colonization', 'Theory of Modernization Through Colonization' and 'Theory of Modernity During Colonization'. Roughly,

the ‘Theory of Modernization Through Colonization’ argues that Japanese colonial rule was an opportunity to modernize Joseon. Conversely, ‘Theory of Exploitation Through Colonization’ is that Joseon already had internal drivers of modernization before being colonized and that Japanese colonization destroyed those drivers. ‘Theory of Modernity During Colonization’ criticizes both the exploitation and modernization theories, arguing that both accept Western modernity as a universal value humans should strive for (Bae, Seong-Joon 2000, 172). In other words, this interpretation points out that both colonization and the national liberation movement were interpreted only from the context of Western modernism (Koh, Seok-Gyu 2002, 99). In short, ‘Theory of Modernization Through Colonization’ differs from ‘Theory of Exploitation Through Colonization’ in viewing colonialism as having stimulated modernization, but in the end, both theories are based on a modernist stance where the Western version is seen as the original. In comparison, ‘Theory of Modernity During Colonization’ understands modernity not as an ideal project that needs to be completed but as a historically existing form (Lee, Byung-Soo 2012, 315).

Kang Man-Kil’s reunification discourse has been criticized from the perspective of the above ‘Theory of Modernity During Colonization’. Kang interprets the social character of the colonial period based on ‘Theory of Innate Development’ or ‘Theory of Innate Modernization’. There is no denying that Kang’s contemplations on reunification are indeed of a ‘modernist stance’, in which completing modernization is positioned as the teleological norm of reunification. For example, he identifies modernity to be ‘yet another progression towards human emancipation’ and ‘a process of expanding the agents of historical development’ - a view certainly close to Western modernism. Furthermore, the fact that Kang argues reform towards constitutional monarchy as a form of political modernization that can only be attained based on capital can be understood as a perspective supporting capitalist form of modernization (Kang, Man-Kil 2010, 300). Here, Kang Nae-Hee criticizes the Theory of Exploitation Through Colonization based on the Theory of Innate Development, saying that it considers capitalist modernization as a universal value of humanity. In other words, historiography dominated by Theory of Exploitation Through Colonization covertly supports Korea’s capitalist modernity and thereby contributes to diluting the social



contradictions caused by capitalism (Kang, Nae-Hee 2002, 77-80).

However, it is difficult to identify Kang's thesis on 'reunification as completion of modernity' as purely supporting Western capitalist modernism because he also defines modernization as a process of 'developing democracy' and 'expanding freedom and equality'. In fact, in light of the fact that such view became more prominent after mid-1990's, Kang's ideas on reunification should be not understood as fixed but rather as continuously evolving. For example, one can link Kang's theories not with his Theory on Seeds of capitalism, a starting point of his historical research, but rather with pacifism, which forms the goal of his later studies - a more proactive interpretation taking into account his evolution of thought. In fact, Kang argues that historiography and historical perception should be the starting point of moving beyond today's dominant neoliberalism towards building an anti-neoliberal regime. Under similar context, although the South-North reunification is completed by building a modern nation state, it is not the ultimate goal. The ultimate aim of humanity is to go beyond the modern nation state towards a single community of peace worldwide. The most important task is weakening the antagonistic barriers set up by nation states and forming a global community of peace.

This does not mean there are no elements of modernism in Kang's reunification discourse. Kang's modernist stance manifests itself through his progressive, optimist and teleological historical perspective. According to Kang, the essential goal of an 'academic discipline' is to improve reality rather than support it as it is. Therefore, an academic discipline is inevitably idealistic to a certain extent. In this sense, "History is the progress of ideal's realization." (Kang, Man-Kil 2002, 13) Kang's reunification methodology follows the same line of reasoning. His theories on reunification are ways of realizing our ideals. Also, in his saying "History is the progress of ideal's realization", he shows his underlying optimist view of history that "History moves in the direction and to the extent it should be moving" (Kang, Man-Kil 2010, 363). The phrase "History is the progress of ideal's realization" contains his belief that humanity, though under endless hardships, will strive for emancipation from constraint and inequality to attain peace. In other words, historical progression is a process of completing humanism, democracy and pacifism, which are indeed Western modernist perceptions.

Therefore, the theory of reunification as a process of ‘completing modernization’ exposes some limitations. First of all, Kang’s reunification discourse continuously shows two-dimensional confrontations. Such two-dimensional dichotomous framework comes from his modernist perspective. In his reunification discourse, juxtapositions such as ‘democracy vs. anti-democracy’, ‘reunification vs. anti-reunification’, ‘freedom vs. constraint’ and ‘cold war vs. post cold war’ are repeated throughout the course of history. Such two-dimensional confrontations of Kang have already been pointed out by others, as a dichotomy between the nationalist movement and the objective circumstances it was trying to overcome. In short, Kang juxtaposes ‘nationalism vs. colonization’, ‘nationalism vs. colonial rule’ and ‘nationalism vs. division’ in an attempt to revive nationalism as an idea that develops autonomously depending on external circumstances (Oh, Doo-Hwan 1985. 301-302). However, the bigger problem is that such two-dimensional juxtapositions are not limited simply to ‘nationalism vs. x’ but that they appear throughout his thoughts on reunification. Constructing the course of history into two-dimensional confrontations can block systematic analysis into the multi-layered and complex structure of the causes of the Peninsula’s division. They can simplify the complicated history of the Peninsula’s division and its perpetuation, thereby preventing the exposure of the multi-dimensional nature of why division continues, an issue that has to be systematically studied in order to overcome division.

The second limitation is one that appears when optimist and progressive historical perspectives are adopted in reunification related discussion. Kang asserts that the social foundation of anti-communism is shrinking and that the wall of anti-communism is crumbling. He also argues the younger generation of the 21st century will overcome divisionist nationalism and animosity between the two Koreas - characteristic of the older generation - and that they are more enthusiastic and determined about reunification (Kang, Man-Kil 2013, 23). However, not only does reality prove otherwise, but such optimist historical awareness may even overlook various reflections and praxes that are needed to reunify the nation. In particular, such optimism can incapacitate the will of various people trying to overcome the circumstances under existing international politics surrounding the Peninsula.

### c) Peace-Oriented Reunification Nationalism: Going Beyond Reunification-Supremacy

Reunification discourse of Kang Man-Kil requires one to consider the normative significance and imperative of reunification as highest values. According to Kang, the imperative of reunification can first and foremost be found in our national history. The reasons why we must reunify are because the two Koreas had lived for a long time as one nation sharing a common blood and tongue, because the entire Peninsula for a long time had formed a historical and cultural community under a single political regime, and because too much energy is being consumed in one nation being divided.

Being one nation goes far beyond simply being a tool for peace. It is about being one ethnic group that has existed for a long time. It is also the unit that forms one national society - one community that cannot have enemies within. However, this sense of national historical imperative - ie., that we must reunify because we are of one blood - has continuously been challenged. For example, there are criticisms against such 'reunification-supremacy', that "The 'two nation states' consolidated after the Korean War cannot be recognized, and only 'nationalist fervor' for reunification is considered important." (Doh, Myeon-Hoe and Yoon, Hae-Dong 2009, 269)

However, in Kang's view, the imperative to reunify lies not just in our national history, but also in East Asian, or even, world history. So he does not argue 'reunification' to be the only important value. Specifically, Kang calls for 'reunification of the Korean Peninsula' in relation to 'building a peace regime in East Asia' (Kang, Man-Kil 2006, 55). In the latter part of the 20th century, 'division of the Peninsula became division of East Asia' and 'reunifying the Peninsula is building a peace regime in East Asia' (Kang, Man-Kil 2008, 537-547). This attachment to 'pacifism' is one of the two mantras constituting Kang's historical view, together with 'inevitable progress of history'. A historian must also be a pacifist, and the goal of history education is world peace (Kang, Man-Kil 2010, 322). Therefore, the imperative for reunification is found not only in the need for national homogeneity or in alleviating economic burden of division. It

must be newly constructed through a future-oriented process such as attaining world peace. In this sense, Kang believes possibilities of reunification will increase only when the issue is dealt within discussions proactively linked to forming a regional peace community like the EU or the ASEAN.

Kang's intent on placing the imperative of reunification within the horizon of building a peace regime in East Asia is positive. However, the problem is his optimism on the regional peace community. The view that establishing an East Asian community will facilitate formation of a peace community on the Korean Peninsula may fail to prudently look at the mutual connections in international politics. The EU was established initially to form an economic and social bloc inside Europe to counter the world regime led by the US, and the ASEAN is a union of capitalist nations in Southeast Asia built to contain the expansion of communism. They do not necessarily match the definition of a regional peace community, all the more so since competition between the member states in both of these unions has become more prominent. In short, the call for reunification from the level of national history blocks a rational and stern awareness of reality in East Asia, and as a result, one can fail to consider the real efforts needed for reunification.

## 5. Back to the Question of What the Duties of Humanities (Scholar) Are

To summarize, for Kang, 'reunification nationalism' is the rightful guiding ideology for the Korean society, contributing to overcoming division and reunifying the nation. Kang's reunification nationalism can be organized into three main points. 1. It is an 'alternative historiography', in which the national united front movement based on negotiations between left and right wings since the colonial period is seen as the mainstream of national history. 2. It recognizes the entire Peninsula as one national unit and it is an 'anti-divisionist historical perception' that considers all Peninsula citizens to be agents of historical development. 3. All Peninsula citizens are seen to constitute one historical and

cultural community, and it is meaningful as a ‘reunification theory’ based on peaceful, reciprocal and equitable methods. All in all, Kang lays out the details of his reunification discourse through the above-elaborated idea of reunification nationalism. This is Kang’s ‘theory of equitable reunification’. He calls himself a ‘pacifist’, an ‘open nationalist’ and a ‘future-oriented humanist’ (Kang, Man-Kil 2013, 10), which are all expressed in his idea of equitable reunification. This theory avoids enforcing the lifestyle, perspective, system and ideology of one side, as is the case with reunification through war or absorption, and instead propose a peaceful reunification that is self-reliant, gradual, reciprocal and self-sacrificial.

However, just as Kang’s reunification discourse has much relevance, there are also clear limitations. Despite his elaborations, he focuses excessively on analyzing the course of history in his historiography, thereby relatively lacking contemplation on detailed reunification methodologies. He has also failed to analyze systematically into the multi-layered and complex structure of the nation’s division, leading him to miss the importance of the need for various self-reflections and praxes needed to reunify the nation. Also, in linking reunification with the idea of an East Asia peace community, he leans too much towards an optimism in his historical awareness.

Nonetheless, these limitations do not damage the significance of Kang Man-Kil’s thoughts on reunification. He places reunification within the process of establishing an autonomous nation state, which is also the process of healing the wounds from colonial oppression and North-South antagonism. It is, at the same time, a process of building a political community with universal values of humanity. In this regard, Kang’s discourse is a ‘reunification discourse based on humanities’, the significance of which is quite clear. It is the result of placing division and reunification as academic subjects of historiography and exerting relentless mental effort into it. His academic endeavors that allow division and reunification to be viewed from a humanities perspective can become a starting point of a humanities-based reunification discourse. The most important aspect of his work is his emphasis on responsibilities of humanities and humanities scholars in the contemporary world.

Finally, I propose a few points that can further develop the positive aspects of Kang’s reunification discourse, in a way that can continue and develop the legacy of his humanities-based reunification discourse. First of all, we need a

humanities-based reunification discourse that is about ‘reunification of the people’. As Kang points out, humanities must come up with the right direction for reunification, which is possible only when there is a change of paradigm in reunification discourse. The process of reunifying the two Koreas entails continuously healing the wounds and the pain left by more than 70 years of division, through which we need to articulate ‘reunification of the people’ that includes national integration. Thus we need to change our mindset by reasserting ‘reunification of the people’, attained through peaceful cooperation and communication between the North and the South.

Second, we need to reflect, through a humanities lens, upon the Korean diaspora scattered around East Asia. In line with Kang’s arguments, the division and reunification of the Korean Peninsula are intertwined with international relations in East Asia as well as with various ethnic and national issues, which require understanding from an East Asian aspect as well as a broader global aspect. In this regard, solidarity and exchange in East Asia are compulsory. However, the problem is that one must avoid taking on a simple optimist prospect when placing reunification within an East Asian context. Such process requires a detailed methodology based on realistic and rational judgment. For example, while seeking exchange and cooperation within international political relations, solidarity and cooperation with the Korean diaspora scattered around East Asia can also contribute to the process and provide an opportunity to drawing a richer future plan for a reunified Korean Peninsula.

Third, we need humanities of praxis that can overcome the deformed and distorted perception despite all the wounds left by division. As mentioned before, Kang emphasizes presentness and praxis of history studies. In the Age of National Division, duties of humanities remain unstopped. In particular, praxis of reunification discourse based on humanities must aim towards overcoming the antagonism between the two Koreas because reunification is not just about merging two separated states but about healing the exclusivity and bitterness rooted down in the minds and bodies of people living in the two states. Therefore, a humanities-based reunification discourse must develop into humanities of praxis that can surmount the wounds of division and ideological animosity.

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