

A Conversation with Du-yul Song*

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About the interviewee

Du-yul Song is a Korean-German sociologist and serves as professor emeritus at the University of Münster. He received his doctorate from Jürgen Habermas in 1972, and has been committed to an understanding and rapprochement between North and South Korea. In 1993, he became a naturalized citizen of Germany. In 2003, he was arrested by the South Korean police on charges of spying for North Korea, and was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment by Seoul Central District Court. In 2004, he received a suspended imprisonment sentence of 3 years by Seoul High Court because the court of appeal found him not guilty on the espionage charges except unauthorized visit to anti-state. Accordingly, he was acquitted after 9 months in jail, and left South Korea in August 2004 after the case closed.

Borderers “Require an Attitude of Tension, Not Eliminating Previous Boundaries, but Holding on to Them, Adhering to the Borders Themselves”

Park Great to meet you! First of all, your trip to North Korea seems to be a practical demonstration of life as a “borderer.” But as a Korean, going to the North was a risk to your life, and the decision itself must have been a terrifying one. How were you able to make and follow through with such a decision?

Song At that time, I think I felt a sense of obligation to properly see the North. There's a book called *Abendlicht* by a German writer named Stephan Hermlin, who used to be the chairman of the Writers' Union in East Germany and the vice chairman of PEN International. He was originally the son of a rich family in Berlin, but he decided to fight the Nazis, and to keep his promise to himself from the age of 14, he joined the Communist Party and fought underground. After the war, he moved to East Germany and lived there, even though he was from West Germany. People used to call him the “ice saint,” which meant he was a saint as frigid as ice. It's times like this when people with good sense can't just sit back and

be discouraged in the face of dark realities. It's times like this when awakened people are willing to face the truth. A sense of duty and intellectual curiosity drove my decision.

Park

I think existential choices are very serious when faced with history. It's true that such choices may be too much for a weak individual to bear; however, some people, like you, don't shy away from it even though it's frightening, and they face it head-on. That's why I think the most interesting philosophical concept in your life and in the way you think is the concept of the "borderer."

You have named your philosophy the philosophy of the "Grenzgager" and said that "Grenzgager" has a triple meaning: a person from the South who travels to and from the North; a person from the East who studies Western philosophy in the West; and a person from the poverty of the Third World who lives in Germany, which is part of the First World. To me, this shows that you exhibit existential thinking linked with the times. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the existential and temporal meanings of "borderers."

Song

The existential life of an individual is like that. Some people use the term "borderer" without much thought, but it's not an easy term to use. The control that is applied to us always operates through the process of creating borders. It tells people, "This is what you are allowed to do," and demands that you stay within set parameters. That's why people often feel secure when they're within those boundaries, but when they go beyond those boundaries and start exploring places they don't know, they get nervous, and it's hard because they must figure out where to go and where to stay.

These days, people often talk about being global players. They call themselves cosmopolitans because they can get on an airplane and travel all over the world, so, they argue, boundaries have become irrelevant. But boundaries are not just one-dimensional lines that separate two worlds; they still create a certain tension in us when we cross them, which is why "crossing boundaries" is not the same as "deterrioralization" in modern Western philosophy. I don't understand what many people think of when they talk

about “deterriorialization,” as if we can just step outside the boundary and everything will be solved.

Just because you’ve crossed boundaries, it doesn’t mean you’ve left the control those boundaries exert. Let’s imagine that a philosopher from the Third World came to the First World. The philosopher, in most cases, would try to conform to the values and thinking of the Western world, and would think that they have become a universal thinker of the world as a result. However, in this case, never mind the global universality; they have lost their roots on the other side, beyond the boundaries that they have crossed.

When I came to Heidelberg, I was originally going to study the difference between Hegel’s and Husserl’s conceptions of historicity, but then I came here and had a lot of experiences that made me think about what that means for me. Then, in France, a Vietnamese philosopher published a book on Marxism and phenomenology, and it had a lot of things in it that I wanted to study. That’s when I started to pay real attention to what I’ve always thought about, which is the question “Who are we?”

For Europeans, Asia is “the Other” I wanted to figure out what that otherness meant, because only in that way could I unravel colonialism’s enormously discriminatory systems of thought. Of course, the biggest influence on me in this research was Marx, but this was not about following the Soviet model of revolution at the time, but rather something more pluralistic, in that the Third World had to find a new way of life in its own way. That’s why I paid attention to the Soviet Union, China, but also to other models of socialism.

I was also interested in the encounter between the First and Third worlds, as well as the encounter between the ideas of the East and the West. But it’s a very big topic, and it tends to take a backseat to more practical issues. Yet I was constantly interested in it. For example, I compared Whitehead’s process philosophy with Buddhist thought . . . and when I look at the Lotus Sutra, I think, “Oh, Whitehead is saying the same thing as the Lotus Sutra.”

Originally, as Foucault said, it’s easy to Westernize the East, but it’s hard to Orientalize the West. That’s because the East and the West have different systems of thought. The

West wants to conquer the East by treating it as “the Other.” They go to Africa, they learn African languages, and they try to dominate that world. Well, nowadays, the West also has a whole business surrounding the idea of “healing” with things like yoga, qigong, meditation, among other things. Anyway, the First World and the Third World, the East and the West, the North and the South, need to adopt an attitude of tension, not to completely erase the old boundaries while crossing the existing boundaries; rather, they must insist on the boundary itself, to hold on to it, and never forgetting the (Buddhist) principle of tension between the “same and different, and different and the same.”

Park

The philosophy of the borderer is less logic that follows the rule of “A=A,” but rather starts from the fact that “A” and “non-A” are bound together in the wholeness of “the world” and “the Korean peninsula.” Therefore, the philosophy of the borderer adheres to the boundary itself that separates “A” and “non-A” and thinks about it holistically. In this respect, it reminds me of the current trend of “transgredience,” which seeks to move beyond the boundaries of “A” and “non-A.” However, whereas “transgredience” seeks to deconstruct wholeness, you want to keep the tension and conflict between the two intact through wholeness.

In 1980s Korea, the radical intellectuals’ reality transformation movement accepted Marxism as an ideological North Star, so to speak. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and other “real socialist” countries in the 1990s, the “post-communism” discussion centered on discourse analysis was in full swing in Korean society with the arrival of Lyotard’s “end of the macro-narrative” and Foucault’s knowledge-power theory and micro-power theory. However, as you said, I think that insisting on “boundaries” is the same as just enduring the tensions caused by boundaries, so, it does exhibit heaviness in the sense that it involves rigor of thinking while bearing the life’s weights. In contrast, constantly deconstructing boundaries and producing differences can be said to be cheerful but lightweight.

Song

Yes, only playfulness may be left standing, so if we go

extremist with this kind of thinking, it goes beyond “liberation” and talks about “liberation of liberation” and even talks about “liberation from liberation.” In short, the concept of “liberation” itself oppresses us, so we have to be liberated from that to be truly liberated.

An Immanent Critique: "To Understand the Other, to Understand Otherness, Is Only Possible through a Reflective Reflection of the Equivalence"

Park But you're adhering to the boundary points, aren't you? The tension or pressure that boundaries produce can be tremendous, and you're using that tension or pressure to fuel your own inner reflection. What is the power of this kind of thinking for you, and how do you overcome that tension and pressure?

Song I would characterize it as a “border experience.” A border experience is a very serious existential experience. However, such an experience is hard to come by in normal circumstances. In our daily lives, we don't have to face that many serious situations, so we just act inertially and don't deeply examine our problems. But when that routine is broken, people get tense and stop moving in the way they normally do.

The word *epoché* itself, in Husserl's philosophy, means “suspension of judgment,” but it originally means a fork in the road. So you stop and redetermine where you need to go. If you keep running, you don't know what's wrong. So, you need to stop. When you get off the wrong road, you can find the right road. That's what a border experience does.

Park Based on this border experience, you propose an “immanent-kritisch methodology” that seeks “the essence of the other from within the other” rather than “absolutizing a priori constructed value system and forcing the other to accept it.” I think this is a critique not only of the adversarial perspective

that unconditionally criticizes the other, but also of the tendency to idealize the other.

In this respect, the issue seems to be deeply related to the “border experience” that pushes me into the tension of the “alter ego.” However, even in Korea, there seems to be a tendency to criticize the “immanent and critical approach” without understanding this. What do you think about such criticism?

Song

In Korea, people tend to think of “immanent” criticism when they hear the name “Song Doo-yul.” However, I think they understand “immanent” in a very simplistic way: they see it as an attitude of “bowing down the North,” in short, defending the North from the North’s point of view. However, the concept of “immanent” is a very important concept philosophically, and it is essential for reflective thought. In order for a critique to be truly reflective, it needs to first be “immanent.”

There is a scholar named Peter Christian Ludz, who was a professor of sociology at the University of Munich. He did research on the elites of the GDR and argued that the GDR elite was not just an elite subordinate to the Soviet Union, but a group of people who had created their own socialism with a new worldview. In short, he argued that the GDR elite was not just an autocratic bureaucracy in a totalitarian system. Furthermore, he tried to break the prevailing paradigm that GDR society was just a copy of the Soviet Union.

Even in Korea, there have been critiques about what I call “immanent criticism.” Critics understand the word “immanent” as just “inside,” so they understand it as “you have to go inside and study North Korea.” But “immanent” doesn’t just mean “in” in the sense of inside and outside. The opposite of “immanent” is *transzendental*. So “immanent,” at a fundamental level, means “empirical.” So it’s telling you to study something empirically, the very constitution of the object.

In other words, it’s telling you to not force the study of something within a pre-given, a priori scheme of organization. One of the things that I often quote is the famous conversation between Zhuangzi and Huizi. Zhuangzi is out for a walk with

Huizi and says, “Those fish are having a lot of fun,” to which Huizi retorts, “No, sir, you’re not one of them, so how do you know whether they’re having fun or not?” To which Zhuangzi replies, “No, you’re not me, so how do you know whether I know or not?” After thinking about this for a while, Huizi asks again, “No, sir, but you are neither me nor the fish, are you not?” To which Zhuangzi says, “Yes, that’s right, so let’s start there.”

It’s not something that you can just start by saying, “I am me,” and then say, “You are this,” and then move on. It’s something that must be reaffirmed through a lot of reflection. Then you can start again. Understanding the other, understanding the otherness, is not something that can be done as simply as, “Hey, you’re this.” It can only be done through reflective reflection on the equivalence. In the end, understanding the other is starting from the point that posts that the other is outside of one’s personal subjective stipulations. Basically, it’s listening to people in the North, including their stories about their lives.

Unification is When “The South and the North Each Expanded Their Borders to Create a Common Space Shared by the Both”

Park

In addition to the immanent and critical approaches, you have also proposed a method called the hermeneutical cycle. However, it seems that the “hermeneutic cycle” tends to get less attention as only the “intrinsic and critical approach” is talked about. Also, many people seem to have an arbitrary understanding of the relationship between the two, without having a precise understanding about it. Please explain how the “intrinsic and critical approach” and the “hermeneutic cycle” are different from each other and how they are related.

Song

If we just look at the trees, we can’t see the forest. You need to know the parts to know the whole, and if you only look at the whole, you neglect the parts. You need to see the forest for

the trees, and you need to know the trees to understand the composition of the whole forest.

However, this reciprocal circulation of parts and wholes may—as Emilio Betti has pointed out—be accessible to just a small elite, just like the specialized work of theologians and pastors interpreting the Bible and judges interpreting and applying the law. This is a very important element in an “immanent-critical” understanding that enables us to read the parts in the context of the whole and the whole in the context of the parts. The same is true for North Korean studies today. We often see a simplistic characterization of some aspects of North Korea as if they were the whole of North Korea, but there are many diversities within North Korean society, and it is necessary to understand each diversity in its own right.

We were taught math incorrectly as children. We were taught in school that $1+1=2$, $1+2=3$, and so on. Nowadays, kids are taught that $1+1$ is very diverse. They are taught that within the concept of 1, there can be not only 1 in a square, but also 1 in a circle. They are taught that $1+1$ is 2, but it has a lot of complexity. But we only think of $1+1=2$, so we think of “unity” as something that makes us all the same, a single identity, and we don’t think of the diversity within that. Unity doesn’t have just one form, either. There are so many different forms. We need it to be so that North can fit in the South, and the South can fit in the North.

In my dissertation, I dealt with the problem of the equivalence ratio, the doubling ratio, and the contradiction ratio. There is a Chinese philosopher named Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886–1973), who was the president of Tsinghua University and held important positions in the government after the establishment of the Chinese government. In the 1930s, he criticized Aristotelian logic along the lines of the equivalence ratio and the doubling ratio, and discussed the characteristics of Eastern thought, borrowing particularly from Confucius and the *Daodejing* 道德經 (The Classic of the Way and Virtue). For example, in a person’s personality, there are the parts that are true and those that are not, and these exist together in the larger category of humanity. This combination makes for a very diverse person. This system of thought falls under the umbrella of polyvalent logic, but

people think of unification as the south completely absorbing the north, the north completely absorbing the south. If the unification is to be pursued in that manner, the result would be nothing but war. The hatred becomes so extreme that one cannot be satisfied unless it completely absorbs the other into itself.

Park

Yes, that's right. The logic that you are talking about is the logic of sameness, which is the modern Western way of thinking that people usually turn to when they contemplate the concept of unification in Korea. Therefore, we criticize the view of unification as the overcoming of heterogeneity and the restoration of homogeneity from the perspective of sameness and define it as the perspective of difference and commonality.

In our view, the perspective of “non-violent integration of diversity” that you mentioned is the integration of these various differences, and the “borderers” and border experiences that you mentioned are actually about this complexity and maintaining the tension of differences. In fact, the more differences and diversity a society has, the more dynamic and creative it is, and I think unification is about producing that dynamic future. A unified Korean peninsula fixed into one shape would have a hopeless future, and I think that's what you're talking about when you say, “The Korean peninsula is our future home.”

Song

That's right, and in that sense, we need to pay attention to paragraph 2 of the June 15 Joint Declaration. The South has been insisting on a federation of states, while the North has been insisting on a federal system, but this declaration finds common ground between the two. North Korea accepted the idea of a federation as a low-level federal system in the sense that a federation of states does not exclude the development of a federal system as demanded by the North. However, it is a transitional system, and it is possible to move forward through a federation of states using the North's federal system. In this way, the South and the North each expanded their borders to create a common space shared by the North and the South. This is the way to move toward unification by

gradually expanding the border space.

Park

You have defined “borderers” as those who stand on the border, expanding the boundaries between two sides and, through that, expanding the space where they can eventually breathe with each other. You also argue that the life of a borderer is one that unification philosophy should adhere to. From this perspective, you have been trying to broaden the borders between the two Koreas by visiting the North and experiencing the borders between the South and the North. However, in South Korea, this has, in reality, become viewed as just “bowing down to the North.” What are your thoughts on this?

Song

Yes, the media is particularly problematic. They tell stories based on interest rather than on facts. . . . If I want to coexist with the Other, I have to think that there is an Other inside me. Unless we understand the Other by putting ourselves in their shoes, we can’t have a dialogue with the Other. Again, there has been a recent dispute about refugees, but the media brings these issues into the public arena.

Subjective Globalization Is “Coming Back into Oneself and Discovering New Horizons Again”

Park

You once said that the current situation on the Korean peninsula, where the North and South are respectively advocating for “globalization” and “subjectivation,” pits “the global” against “the local” and “the universal” against “the particular” and that we need to move beyond the “globalization versus independence” to “subjective globalization.” In this regard, you once said that “subjective globalization” is “the idea that the North and the South maintain dynamic stability by setting up each other as a system and each other as an environment.” I’d like to hear what you mean by “subjective globalization.”

Song

When people think of “globalization,” they only think about heading out somewhere, so they can’t get out of their subjective philosophical mindset. The earth is not flat, so it doesn’t actually have a center. When you go out and about, you come back to yourself, and when you come back to yourself, new horizons appear. This process of coming back to yourself and discovering new horizons is what I call “subjective globalization.”

Park

Currently, the South and the North are divided over the term “globalization,” with the South embracing it as “internationalization” and the North viewing it as “integration” and therefore viewing it very negatively. Your “subjective globalization” seems to be an attempt to break out of these two opposing sides to deal with the current situation within the totality of the Korean peninsula. What are your thoughts on this?

Song

The North calls it “integration” because the U.S. is making the world into one. The North also sees this process as the U.S. destroying and taking over everything. In this sense, the North also falls into a very subjective philosophical trap, which is that in order to protect themselves from the process of the U.S. taking over everything, they feel the need to reject “integration”; that’s why they adhere to anti-integration anti-globalization policies and try to prevent infiltration of foreign capital and culture.

When I googled Pyongyang time today, I saw that it hadn’t changed yet. Even if Pyongyang says, “We are who we are,” and changes its time zone, that doesn’t mean that the rest of the world will immediately accept it. Of course, there’s a wrong-headed preconceived notion here. Some people say they’ve never seen half-hour increments before because most time zones are an hour apart. But when I went to Sri Lanka, which is Buddhist, I found that they have a 30-minute time difference with India, which is Hindu. They said the time difference was determined when they gained independence from British rule. Same with Nepal . . . In fact, most of the colonized countries had the same concept of time as the imperialist parent country did. Considering this, the new

Pyongyang time in the North reflects its perception of time that came out of the principle of denying the time zones set during the Japanese colonization and those set by the United States to unify its wartime operations in Japan and Korea.

Park

Now that you mention it, there is an argument that Korea should change its standard time to Seoul as part of efforts to cleanse the country of the remnants of Japanese colonialism. The present standard time in Korea is based on Tokyo time, which was imposed by the Japanese. I know that when Korea first set up a time zone during the Korean Empire, that time was based on Seoul time, which was 30 minutes later than Tokyo's standard time. In any case, what you're saying is because myself and what's outside of myself are interlocked, I have to see myself within the relationship between the two.

Song

Yes. That's correct. I've used the term "subjective philosophy" before, but European philosophy is basically subjective philosophy. A typical one is "I am the I." "The Other can only be established if there is an I. If I don't assume I, then there's no meaning in any philosophy." But in Eastern philosophy, the notion of "I" is not a self-presupposition, it's a relational notion, so the "non-I" tends to go hand in hand with it. The Buddhist concept of "*pratitya-samutpada*" (dependent co-arising) is also about establishing the self in the midst of various relations or networks, and when you establish the self, of course, you're simultaneously presuming the environment you're in and the relationships you're in.

Europe has traditionally has a very strong idea of the "I," and one of the people who shattered this idea was Nietzsche, who saw this idea of the Subjekt-Ich as a complete illusion, a fiction. In other words, I am something that I construct, not something that exists objectively. Freudian psychology emphasizes this, even going so far as to say that I am not the master of my own house. If someone knocks on your door and asks you, "Who is this?" you usually say, "It's me." But just as it's never easy to explain who you are, the concept of "I" is not something that comes naturally to you.

Most of the time in the East, meanwhile, "I" is a concept that exists within a family or a country or a society, and we

lump them all together and just say “we.” We refer to our wives as “a person of our house.” This way of thinking doesn’t assume “I,” but it assumes “us.” Of course, that doesn’t mean that there’s no self-consciousness, but at least it’s clear that the “I” is defining the “who” in a system of relationships, rather than being presupposed by the self and then defined by everything else. If you look at Latin, even if you don’t have a subject, the subject is there because of the predicate, because the subject already defines the predicate. In the Korean language, a sentence can be understood without a subject. It’s a language system very much centered on relationships.

Park I think that relationship-centered thinking is very important. Relationships are not something that either side can move forward with unilaterally, right? And yet, relationships seem to create a special relationship, a “we,” between the two people who are in it. So, it seems that this shift in thinking is needed most of all in inter-Korean relations.

Song Yes, even last year, President Park Geun-hye unilaterally declared in Dresden that the two Koreas will be unified soon. I think she said that because that’s what she feels, but it’s a completely disrespectful behavior toward the other side. When we talk about national unification, we can’t talk about it completely without the concept of “I” or “we,” so we have to look at “relationship,” not a straight, vertical hierarchy between “I” and “we” as “objects” defined by “I” or “we,” but a logic of coexistence that emphasizes the mode of relationship between me and you, not one based on equality with the object that I define and dominate. In other words, as long as the North and the South fight about the subject and object, we can’t escape this subjectivist trap.

I-You-We: “When Seen as an Environment, the North Is Not Merely an Object of Unification, but a Premise for the South to Live in”

Park So what attitude should the North and the South have towards each other?

Song As long as the South is the subject, it should see the North as the environment, and as long as the North is the subject, it should see the South as the environment. Just as N. Luhmann talks about “system” and “environment,” organisms must adapt to and overcome their environment in order to survive. The same is true for societies. Society, too, operates on the premise of a given environment in order to be maintained. In that sense, I am suggesting that we look at the North not as an object, but as an environment: the North is not simply an object of unification, but a foundation for the South to continue living.

The environment is much more complex than the system, so by setting the North as the environment, we can understand the North as a society more holistically, and others can respond to it. If we see the North as a totalitarian society, a dictatorship of the Suryong (Supreme Leader), or an object with a tightly closed structure within a planned economy, we cannot find any dynamism within it. But the North possesses many different elements that allow it to survive. Only when we have this perspective, can we develop a mutually adaptive relationship with each other, rather than treating each other as objects that one can do with as they please. And only then can we think about the issue of unification in terms of not only peace in Northeast Asia but also world peace.

Park In this regard, I think we need to pay attention to the double-layered danger of the “dangerous society” and “divided society” that you have already mentioned. You have said that the “dangerous society” and the “divided society” are intertwined inseparably on the Korean peninsula. You have defined the task of unification on the Korean peninsula as a

double-layered task of “overcoming the dangerous society that modernity has created” and “overcoming the divided society that is unique to the Korean peninsula.”

However, the neo-Cold War order that is forming in Northeast Asia and the extreme conservatism that is emerging throughout the world are amplifying the risks through the vector of Korean “division.” It’s as if we’re seeing a combination of the dangerous society and the divided society that you talked about. Given this, what kind of relationship should the North and the South have with each other in this international environment?

Song

Unfortunately, Northeast Asia, unlike Europe, is still very much a region in the midst of a Cold War. There is the rise of China, a massive country, and the economic giant of Japan, but that doesn’t mean that the currently divided Korean peninsula has the ability to balance the power between them. I think that it might be possible to think about overcoming the division of the Korean peninsula from the perspective of “us”— the North and the South.

For example, European integration is the result of a long-term effort that began with the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 and has continued to the present day. There have also been issues such as disparities between the countries that make up Europe and reparations related to Nazism. On the one hand, there were critiques that the European single currency was a “Germanization” of Europe, but by finding a balance of power and reconciling the differences among the middle countries rather than the big powers, 28 countries were able to participate in European integration. In other words, Germany has managed to make its reunification go hand in hand with European integration. This is because West Germany and East Germany have adapted to each other by thinking of the Other as an environment, and at the same time, they have dealt with the changes of European integration through that.

Park

As you mentioned, in the current situation where the United States and China are competing for hegemony and Japan is rearming itself, it seems to be very important for the North

and the South to respond to the international situation by seeing each other as an environment. From this perspective, the “reflective nationalism” you mentioned seems to be even more of a necessity. You said that nationalism today should be a “reflective nationalism” that reflects “in” rather than “out,” and a nationalism that acquires universality that can coexist with other peoples while protecting “ethnicity.” In your opinion, what is this kind of nationalism in relation to the current situation?

Song

Some people say I’m a “nationalist leftist,” and that was one of the impressions I got when I went to the North. People in the North, including Kim Il-sung, often talk about patriotism, or “socialist patriotism.” Of course, in order to solve the problems of socialism locally, you have to talk about the dignity of your own people, but you also have to talk about the dignity of other people. Kim Il-sung emphasized that nationalism is not exclusive, and in any case, in order to defend oneself in a colonial state, a strong expression of will, “I am I,” may have been important, but at the same time, in an international environment, solidarity in creating various relationships with other countries becomes important. International solidarity between “party to party” and “people to people,” or proletarian internationalism, as they say, is important.

Park

But, “socialist patriotism” and “proletarian internationalism” seem to be at odds with each other. In actual history, in fact, proletarian internationalism seems to have been distorted by nationalism. The Second International was eventually destroyed because it stood on the side of its own people and nation in the First World War, and the Soviet Union, which was built by Lenin— who was thoroughly critical of nationalism at the time—was eventually transformed into a “proletarian internationalism” centered on the Soviet Union as a socialist fatherland by Stalin, who put forward the theory of one-state socialism. Therefore, the harmonization of proletarian internationalism and socialist patriotism, while idealized, seems to have consisted of the breakdown of internationalism by nationalism.

Song

Of course, historically, proletarian internationalism has constantly faced failure, which is why some internationalists talk about a truly stateless internationalism. But even today, in the absence of an entity that creates solidarity beyond the nation-state—internationalism—it is wishful thinking to talk about solidarity. When the Sino-Soviet ideological debate occurred, North Korea responded by saying, “I’m not going to take a side, I’m going to sit in my chair, and you guys shouldn’t nag me about sitting in your right chair or sitting in your left chair.” That’s why Kim Jong-il, along with Sukarno, Nehru, Castro, Tito, and others, led the solidarity among non-aligned countries at that time.

Park

As you said, it’s true that the idea of non-alignment in the Third World was meaningful in the formation of the East-West Cold War system that was in full swing after World War II, and I think it’s true that North Korean internationalism was influential at that time. But now, the very faction that created the East-West Cold War system has collapsed. Can the idea of non-alignment still be meaningful in these circumstances? Moreover, since the mid-1980s, the DPRK has been moving in the opposite direction to internationalism, toward strengthening nationalism based on ethnic identification, by advocating “Korean-style socialism,” “Korean nationalism,” and so on.

Song

I think that’s been forced by the realities North Korea faces. Honestly, North Korea is a very small country, and it’s blockaded by politically and economically powerful countries like the U.S. and Japan. In order to survive, North Korea has no choice but to be more united internally. In addition, the U.S., which has overwhelming military power, is blockading North Korea, while the South, which has economic power, is supported by the U.S. in many ways, including U.S.F.K. North Korea has to bleed even more to fight back against these circumstances, and it’s easy to see how it could have gotten to the point where it decided that using a nuclear weapon was the only option.

In any case, the important thing now is to find ways to solve our problems. Many people go to the West to study. But

even if they learn Western modern philosophy, they can't gain more achievements than Western scholars. Philosophy should start from a consciousness of reality and the problems on the ground. When the World Philosophical Congress was held in Athens, I contacted people in Seoul to organize a workshop to bring together philosophers from Japan and Korea to discuss peace in Northeast Asia, but there was hardly any response from Korea, so it didn't happen.

"The People Who Will Live Here after Unification Are the Future Generations, and They Need to Create New Principles That Will Determine Their Future and Seek Unification on That Basis"

Park

In this regard, I think we need to revisit the six themes of unification philosophy that you named in 1991 as "Categories of Meta-Theory of Unification Theories." Here you formalized each of the six themes as: (1) a philosophy of peace, which states that there should be no war; (2) a philosophy of dialogue, which has a "dialectical nature of changing together"; (3) a philosophy of solidarity, which "identifies us as a collective singularity in Solidarität"; (4) a philosophy of process, which seeks change through relationships rather than entities; (5) a philosophy of hope, which "draws on the future rather than a simple return to the past"; and (6) a "philosophy of responsibility," which reflects on our responsibility to future generations. Among these six themes, which do you think is the most important principle?

Song

All six principles are important. However, the one I would like to emphasize at this time is the "philosophy of responsibility," which reflects on our responsibility to future generations. Habermas said something like this before German reunification. In his view, there could be two ways to reunify Germany at that time. One was for the GDR to petition the West and have itself absorbed into the West, since the West was dominating the GDR in almost every way. Habermas

said an emphatic “no” to this option, and the reason he gave for his opposition to it was that a reunified Germany is where our future generations are going to live, and so the idea was that those people should come together and rewrite a constitution that will determine their future, and then reunify under that constitution.

But the reunification of Germany didn't work out that way because the West absorbed the East with its overwhelming economic power. When they did that, all the East German companies went out of business and the East German people became second-class citizens. The people who are going to live here on the Korean peninsula after reunification are the future generations, and they're not the ones who lived in the past, but the ones who are going to live in the future. They need to create new principles that will determine their future, and to seek reunification on that basis.