

Interview

An Interview with Dr. Kang Man-gil

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Interviewee: Kang Man-gil

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(Editor’s note: Since 2016, a series of interviews has been conducted by the members of the Institute of Humanities for Unification (IHU) with the most prominent thinkers, researchers, and policy-makers whose thought, research, or professional achievements in dealing with the issues of inter-Korean division and reconciliation have a special connection to the conceptual and methodological advancement of Humanities for Unification. The IHU published these interviews in *Han’gung chisǒnggwaŭi t’ongiltaedam* [Unification Dialogue with Korean Intellectuals] in 2018. From March 2020, their translations in English will appear in *S/N Korean Humanities*. By making their insights available in English, the IHU hopes to engage with a wider international readership in future discussions on inter-Korean division and unification based on the humanities perspective. Relying on the humanities will allow us to contemplate the past, present, and future of unification as a *process* led by *all* Korean people, a shift from focusing on political elites, systems, and institutions. To mark the launch of the new section, we begin with an interview with Dr. Kang Man-gil, the renowned author of *Pundanshidaeŭi yǒksainshik* [The Historical Perception of the Era of Division] and historian whose research has been centered on the national unification united front.)

The Beginnings of Kang’s Historical Studies on Overcoming Division

Park The start of your academic inquiry was your argument concerning the fact that the historical perspective that aims to “overcome” the colonial view of history—a view that has been transformed ideologically—overlooking the present-day realities faced by Korean division, something you have called “the study of history’s neglect of the present.” You have criticized the fact that this view of history, which has been used as a way of explaining South Korea’s “indigenous development,” is both ambiguous

and divisive, and was completely usurped by the Pak Chŏnghŭi regime's "self-reliant and nationalist view of history"—a view, of course, that promoted the idea of Korea as "one nation." Given that, I am wondering what limitations this view of history had that made it so susceptible for use by the dictatorship of the 1950s and 1960s. I am also wondering what kinds of things you wanted to inherit from that nationalist view of history and what things you tried to overcome.

Kang I believed that historical studies in South Korea had two things to accomplish after Korea's liberation from Japan. The first was to properly compile the history of the Korean independence movement and then teach it in a way that would give people a sense of national pride. The second was to overcome the "colonial view of history." As you know, colonialists describe the societies they rule over as extremely backward as part of their efforts to justify their domination. For example, the Japanese have long talked about our history as the history of a very backward country. However, when the Pak Chŏnghŭi regime came into power, there were those, especially in historical studies circles, who started talking about a view of history aimed at overcoming this "colonial view of history," along with the idea that the roots of capitalism began during the late Chosŏn period, as if these theories actually supported the Pak regime's efforts to economically develop the country. This, however, was clearly not the case. We were trying to overcome the colonial view of history; we had no intention whatsoever to put forth a theory that would have supported the Pak regime's economic construction. What's important is that the Pak regime always considered the North [Korea] to be the "enemy." I thought, however, that North Koreans are not our enemy, but rather our compatriots. I knew that we had to unify the two Koreas at some point. I also thought that we needed to eliminate the sense of hostility that existed toward the North to achieve

unification. That's how the study of history that focused on overcoming division and the unification-oriented view of history came into existence.

Park Since you've brought up the Pak Chŏnghŭi era, I have another question for you. The Pak regime had a long history of proactively using ideologies from several academic areas. At the time, South Korea's philosophical studies were impacted by this and stressed "Korean things" while also trying to cleverly connect those "things" to nationalism. They also embraced some philosophical ideas from overseas and applied them to the Korean Peninsula with a view to use them as theories to strengthen the authority of the state. In that sense, the Pak regime emphasized the "Korean spirit" and "Korea's national spirit." What are your thoughts on this?

Kang The Pak regime was susceptible to the charge of being pro-Japanese. Many of those in the regime were graduates of Japanese military academies in Manchuko, and they worked very hard to gloss over the historical blotches on their record. One prominent example of their whitewashing of history was to start handing out awards to "Korean independence fighters." These awards were aimed at covering up their pasts. Pak Chŏnghŭi had been involved in the leftist movement after liberation and felt a sense of inferiority because of it. That's why he became what I'll call an "ultra-rightist."

Chung Then, from Pak Chŏnghŭi's perspective, he used such things as the independence movement and the issues surrounding colonialism to overcome his own feelings of inferiority stemming from his pro-Japanese past, and, in tandem, the famous intellectual ideologues of the time also adhered strongly to same methods.

Kang Almost all those people had cooperated with the Japanese during the colonial period. Right? Would

a person who participated in the independence movement have cooperated with the Japanese? The well-known intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s were largely graduates of Keijo Imperial University during the Japanese colonial period. If they had graduated from Keijo Imperial University, then it was clear they weren't just anybody. So that's why, at the end of the day, they were all the same type of people.

Kang's Lifetime Focus of Research: "Minjokt'ongilchönsön" [National Unification United Front]

Chung There's something I see when I look over the contributions you have made to academia over the years. You've scrutinized issues relating to handicraft manufacturing and the product economy in the late Chosön period; then, as you were just discussing, you gradually shifted your focus of research onto the issues of division and unification and the National Unification United Front. I can clearly see there's been that kind of flow in your work over the years.

Kang At the time, almost all professors taught their students about the "rightist" view of history of the independence movement. When I started my own research on the subject, however, I found that the history of Korea's independence movement was one that involved both the rightists and the leftists. The people who were involved in the independence movement—be they rightists or leftists—never dreamed that Korea would become two countries after liberation. We generally believe that the rightist/leftist joint movement began with the Shin'ganhoe [the United Front for Independence], but before that there was the Minjokyuiltangundong [the National One-Party Movement], and the National Unification United Front had already been established. At the

very end, the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea was jointly made up of rightists and leftists. I believed it was important to shed a light on this reality of history—something, of course, we had little idea about at the time. I wanted to tell the world that Korea’s independence movement wasn’t just a movement of the left or the right, but one that combined those from both sides. I also thought that the leftist movement during the Japanese occupation period needed to be seen as linked with the broader independence movement. In short, I wanted to show that it wasn’t just some communist movement happening on the sidelines; rather, I wanted to show that it was fully a part of the broader independence movement. I was probably the first scholar to discuss the Korean communist party’s role in the section of my introductory Korean history textbook devoted to the independence movement.

Chung Yes. You were the first to publish a balanced description of the rightist and leftist contribution to the independence movement. But I think you had an unusual reason in continuing to link your research on the National Unification United Front issue to the history after Korea’s liberation. You probably aimed to “recover” the history of the independence movement, but I think that it also strongly reflected your desire to overcome the present “division system.”

Kang I took on that research more fully after publishing the book *Pundanshidaeüi yöksainshik* [The Historical Perception of the Era of Division]. In that book, I tried to discuss the meaning of the study of history based on the definition of the “era of division,” and after that I felt I needed to shed clear light on both the history of the independence movement and the complete history of the movement led jointly by rightists and leftists. I did that because

I believe that was the only way that I could better encourage Koreans to reunite with each other. I wanted the leftist movement to be known as a part of the movement to liberate the nation, not just as a leftist movement. That's why I thought that the leftist movement, including the history of the Korean communist party, needed to be seen as part of the national liberation movement, which was very active during the Japanese occupation period. Of course, I did have concerns about doing this. However, I felt that if I was defining the history in that way academically, I had no reason to fear any sacrifice I would have to make coming from that decision. I did suffer quite a bit, but that's not something I had control over. I made that decision because it fit my own scholarly conscience, and I didn't want to shrink away from any responsibility I had to take on.

The Origins of Division and How to Achieve Unification

Park I would like to move onto a different question now. When reading your works, I have found that you argue there were both “internal” factors and “external” factors in why Korea became divided. In terms of the internal factors, you have argued that the methodological and ideological confrontation of the national liberation movement during the colonial period joined hands with the US and Soviet military occupation of North and South Korea, which ultimately led to intense discord between the right and the left. In terms of the external factors, you have argued that the origins of division can be found in the Korean Peninsula's geopolitical situation as well as being directly impacted by the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. There are many people who believe that your theory about the origins of Korea's

division essentially places blame on the Korean Peninsula's geopolitical situation. That's because both the external and internal factors you have described were, at their core, driven by the Cold War between the US and the USSR. Moreover, you have argued that the only way for the Korean Peninsula to become unified amid current international political circumstances that influence its geopolitical situation is for the two Koreas to avoid joining either side and for them to create and maintain a "harmonious system" based on trust. Others, however, criticize your views and argue that you suggest that Korea is forever fated to be in the position it is in; in other words, they suggest your views place too much emphasis on Korea's geopolitical situation to explain why division occurred, why it continues, and also how unification should come about. I wanted to hear your thoughts on this.

Kang I think that we need to know a lot about the "origins of division." The more we know about it, the better. That's because more knowledge about it will create more opportunities to end division. However, up until now there have been very few people who have explained Korea's division as being due to its geopolitical situation. They have long blamed the US and Soviet confrontation and ideological conflict. When taking a closer look, however, the threat of Korea's division didn't appear right after the Second World War. Korea had already faced the threat of division back during the first Sino-Japanese War. At the time, there was a plan presented to prevent the war from happening. The plan involved having the Qing Dynasty rule over Hamgyōng, P'yōngan and Hwanghae provinces, with the Japanese ruling over Kyōngsang, Chōlla, Ch'ungch'ōng and Kangwōn provinces. The Chosŏn king, meanwhile, would have only ruled over Kyōnggi province. So, Korea faced the danger of division even then. The same thing happened during the Russo-Japanese War.

Russia started to spread its influence into the Korean Peninsula as part of efforts to oppose Japan's moves to put the peninsula under its influence. The Russians even allowed the Korean king to seek refuge in their consulate. Russia also tried to build a naval base in Masan. From Japan's perspective, such a development would have meant that Russia's "knife" could be poised to pierce its "heart." Japan, however, couldn't beat Russia alone. Japan borrowed money from the US and England for its war against Russia, which allowed Japan to win. As all of this shows, the Korean Peninsula has long been an arena of competition between the continental and seafaring countries.

So, we continue to think that Korea faced division for the first time after the end of the Second World War, but that's just not the case. As I said, division loomed over the peninsula since at least the first Sino-Japanese War. If we don't clearly acknowledge this fact, we can't overcome division. Of course, there are other, ideological issues that exist and will need to be resolved to achieve unification; nonetheless, we need to clearly understand the peninsula's geopolitical situation. The geopolitical issue will ultimately be linked with how the two Koreas unite, but we must clearly recognize the fact that the peninsula's geopolitical situation is inextricably linked with interests held by surrounding major powers. President Kim Taechung [Kim Dae Jung]'s June 15 North-South Joint Declaration, which emphasized inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation, was based on a practically minded understanding of the Korean Peninsula's geopolitical situation - namely that the peninsula sits in the "crevice" of the major powers.

Park When we talk about unification, we hear this a lot: "Unification isn't possible. China doesn't want it and will oppose it. The US also doesn't want unification. So, there's no way unification can happen." The path

forward is, as you said, for the two Koreas to create a strong system of solidarity and cooperation. What kind of steps or processes will the two Koreas have to go through to achieve this?

Kang Korea has gone through “three stages of division.” The first stage was what we can call “territorial division” [kukt’ot’ongil]. Essentially, that was the appearance of the 38th Parallel. The second stage was “division of the state” [kukkabundan] which led to the appearance of two countries, North and South Korea. However, even up to that point, peoples in the two Koreas still had a clear consciousness of being the same people. Due to the Korean War, however, the two Koreas became enemies. That led to “national division” [minjokpundan], the third stage. So, in order, Korea first experienced “territorial division,” then “division of the state,” followed by “national division.” But I wonder if the process of unification will occur in a similar way. What did the June 15 North South Joint Declaration say? It emphasized the importance of mutual reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas. While acknowledging that the two Koreas were enemies in the past, it proposed that the peoples of the two Koreas should become one nation again. In other words, the declaration was the start of “national unification.” Of course, unification won’t happen quickly, and it will be accompanied by very difficult days ahead. In reality, the quickest way for the two Koreas to unify would be through war.

Park That’s right.

Kang What, however, did the Korean War teach us? It taught us that the Korean Peninsula clearly can’t be unified through war. Following Germany’s unification, many people have been arguing for German-style “unification by absorption.” That’s not the way to go, in my opinion. Unification by absorption and unification brought about through

war may be different in a methodological sense, but they end with the same result. They're the same because the side that wins the war ends up dominating the Korean Peninsula while the side that absorbs the other ends up ruling over the losing side. What this clearly shows is that neither unification through war nor unification through absorption are the ways to go. Then, how should unification come about? I think that it needs to come about gradually. I don't know how long it will take. But as I said before the two Koreas have already started the process of "national unification." What's next, then? The reopening of the now shutdown Kaesŏng Industrial Complex, the connecting of railroads – in short, the start of territorial unification.

Park Yes, I see.

Kang Peace will come to the Korean Peninsula when national unification occurs, and territorial unification gradually starts to move forward. In my estimation, I think it's alright if unification of the two states happens later. If national unification and territorial unification make good strides, that would leave unification of the two states left, and even that kind of unification has already been mentioned in the June 15 Joint Declaration. Unification of the two states refers to a unified country that exercises control over the military and diplomacy. The two Koreas would hold control over their own internal affairs for a considerable amount of time. Even if the two Koreas didn't move to immediately exercise control over military and diplomacy as one state, they would have already agreed to cooperate and avoid confrontation with each other. If that happens, then ultimately unification of the two states will occur naturally. Of course, it will take a long time. The emotions between the two Koreas have worsened over time and they also fought a war against each other. As I said before, however, we need to move toward achieving national

and territorial unification. If that happens, we will be able to accomplish unification of the state at some point. The importance or weight given to state authority will gradually decrease as we head further into the 21st century.

Park That's what South Korea is experiencing now, right?

Kang [Laughs] No. You need to look further into the future. For example, while the EU is now facing problems, people couldn't even imagine that something like the EU could emerge from Europe. After all, that is where two world wars were waged in the past. But in Europe—the heart of colonialism—the EU appeared even before the end of the 20th century, which experienced a great many wars. That's not all. ASEAN is doing well. The African Union is also growing. NAFTA, in North America—albeit it is different in many ways—is coming into its own as a joint economic community. South America is also discussing the creation of a similar joint economic community. The era in which states raised their borders is passing us by. World history is going in that direction. What can we do in this situation? Vietnam unified as a socialist country, but it is nonetheless part of ASEAN and an active member at that. Even China, which is, economically speaking, a capitalist country yet politically still a socialist system, is part of ASEAN +3. I think that we need to add North Korea to ASEAN to form an ASEAN +4. The Korean Peninsula needs to become a bridge of peace that connects maritime nations with the broader continent in East Asia. I think that we need to take the long view to solve the unification problem by making the Korean Peninsula a bridge of peace that connects the maritime and continental states.

The Meaning of Kang's "Equal," "Reciprocal," "Independent," "Gradual," "Incremental," "Neutral," "Peaceful" and "Negotiated" Unification Theories

Park You have written about ways for the two Koreas to reunify in several of your books. You have used various expressions in your arguments, including the phrases "equal unification" "reciprocal unification," "independent unification," "gradual unification," "neutral unification," "peaceful unification," and "negotiated unification." Overall, however, I think we can summarize all this into your theory of "equal unification." You have noted that to put this "equal unification" into practice would require the two Koreas to objectively understand their differences in politics, economics, society and culture. Moreover, it would require efforts to overcome these differences and regain "national homogeneity." These days, however, the idea of recovering Korea's traditional homogeneity is being challenged. These criticisms focus on the dangers that emphasis on such homogeneity can bring about or whether we can even say that the peoples of the two Koreas were ever homogeneous. What are your thoughts on these criticisms?

Kang Then, there would be no reason to unify, would there? We should then just continue living divided. Why do we even talk about unification? The important thing is understanding the fact that if the Korean Peninsula never unifies then it will be perennially stuck in conflict. We need to find a way to stop this conflict, so what should we be talking about? There's nothing else to talk about apart from the Korean nation. We've lived as one for thousands of years, so why do we have to live apart like this? And it's not like we're just living apart as friends; we've become enemies

stuck in a confrontation egged on by outside powers. I think there's no other way of resolving this situation apart from regaining Korea's homogeneity.

Park I see. But, in any case, the two Koreas have become very different places over the past 70 odd years since their division, haven't they?

Chung To add to that, when looking at Germany's unification, there have been more cultural clashes than expected between former East Germans and former West Germans and a great deal of conflict has been observed in the process of the two Germanies becoming one. The worry, I think, is that Korea could face a similar situation.

Kang Of course, the two Koreas have been apart for so long that such concerns or a feeling of distance between each other is natural in the beginning of the process. There will be clashes and shocks in the beginning. However, the two Koreas speak the same language, have the same lifestyles, and share the same history. Given that, I think that the sense of distance felt between the two Koreas will resolve itself quickly. I also believe that if people interact with each other things will change clearly at some point. Now, however, things have been shut down so suddenly between the two Koreas that's there's nothing we can do. When the two Koreas begin interacting with each other again, however, the gaps and differences in their economies, politics, societies and cultures will resolve themselves. Let me tell you a personal experience I had.

When we first sent clothes to North Korea they told us to remove all the labels on the clothes before sending them. When I arrived in Kaesŏng for the last time, however, I saw a sack of rice with the words "Republic of Korea" on it—it was rice sent by us to them. They had refused to receive clothes with our label on it at first, but, later, they didn't resist receiving rice sacks

with the words “Republic of Korea” on them. I had a similar experience when I visited Mt. Kūmgang. There were slogans written in red on the rocks on the mountain. The last time I visited there, however, I found that the red writing had become very hard to see. I asked one of the Hyundai Asan employees what had happened. They told me that the North Koreans had tried erasing the writing because South Koreans had continued raising questions about it. In short, the North Koreans had erased it because South Koreans had asked about it and even though the writing had been propaganda. I think that the two Koreas need to experience this kind of process. They have been divided for so many decades that we can’t expect them to meet as friends at first. They need a process of meeting and communicating about their differences.

Chung Then, we need to make efforts over time to find a balance until the two Koreas can unify on balanced, equal and reciprocal terms. When that balance is found, unification can occur in an equal, reciprocal and fair way...

Kang That’s exactly what I’d call the process of unification. The June 15 North South Joint Declaration was one part of that process. There’s an imperative for us to understand that people interacting with each other is one part of the unification process—not war or unification by absorption.

The Realities Korea Faces, a Divided Nation, and the Significance of Unification Nationalism

Park I have another question for you. You have referred to the perspective of history aimed at overcoming division “unification nationalism.” When reading your books, however, you seem to have clearly

discussed the limits that nationalism faces. If nationalism goes down the wrong path, you have noted that it can potentially lead to reactionism, ultra-nationalism, heroism, and nationalism. Despite this, you still argue strongly that the Korean Peninsula needs unification nationalism. Of course, we fully understand that we can't neglect the fact that the real defining power and practical strength that nationalism has had in the Korean Peninsula, which, as you'll agree, has long experienced a strong nationalist consciousness. However, as we've entered the 21st century South Korean academia has moved to highlight the "post-nationalism" discourse, and we are starting to see criticisms of the unification nationalism you argue for. What is the unification nationalism you are arguing for and what kind of significance do you think it has?

Kang Let me ask you a question. What should we talk about when we discuss the justifications for Korean unification? The reasons the two Koreas need to unify? Humanism? [Pan-]Asianism? I have focused on the fact that the Korean Peninsula is a divided nation and believe that we need to understand the special characteristics that such a society has. If we were talking about another area outside of the Korean Peninsula, then I think that nationalism should be watered down to match the present flow of world history. We, however, are a divided nation. What is the most urgent and important issue facing our nation? Unification, of course. What, apart from nationalism, can we put forth that would justify Korea's unification? What I'm really trying to ask here is whether there is anything else we can bring to the table when discussing unification apart from the clear fact the two Koreas are part of the same nation, use the same language, share the same history, and have the same culture. I may be part of an older generation, but I don't know if there's anything else other than nationalism that can provide the justification for unification.

Park So, I could interpret your thinking like this: The unification nationalism you have defined is nationalism for unification, not unification to support nationalism, right?

Kang Yes. Of course. I am talking about using a transformative and future-oriented nationalism as an ideology to achieve Korean unification. The current era is gradually rejecting nationalism and the world is moving past nationalism, so people studying history can't talk [favorably] in support of nationalism. The crucial issue remains, however, whether ideology is required for unification and, if so, what kind of ideology.

Chung As criticisms over nationalism have emerged, the younger generation tells themselves that the nation doesn't have much significance and that unification has no significance, either. In short, the rejection of nationalism has become linked with questions about whether the two Koreas need to unify.

Kang The two Koreas are facing enormous problems because they haven't become unified. It's unfortunate that this fact has not been felt by many people. The issue of unification is one [major] part of our lives. South Korea is spending massive amounts of money on defense, as I mentioned before, and [young] people at the peak of their lives must serve in the military. I want people to connect all those things with Korea's division and view things more broadly.

Park When reading your book "Yöksagaüi shigan" [An Historian's Time] published in 2010 and "Pundan'got'onggwa t'ongilchönmangüi yöksa" [The Pain of Division and the History of Prospects for Unification] published in 2013, you emphasize the progressive, optimistic and philosophical view of history. You combine your views of history and views on unification to argue that "the social foundation for

anti-communism is declining, which has led to the crumbling of anti-communist [sentiments]” and that “The young generation in the 21st century will be able to overcome the divided nationalism and inter-Korean confrontation that defined past generations and will have both deeper and more proactive thinking and desires toward the issue of unification.” But, now, as I mentioned before, the realities in South Korea suggest that just the opposite is occurring. I wanted to ask what you thought about that.

Kang From an historian’s perspective, there is one hope that I think we should all share. While reality is, of course, the reality, scholars can present their opinions as “being the right path to take.” I think that the more people we have in our society saying that the better. Of course, you can argue that my thinking may doesn’t fit with the mindset of the younger generation. However, should an older person just say things that match up with the thinking of the younger generation? Older people have more experience, have lived longer and should say things that younger people might not accept - particularly if the older people think it will help things. You could counter that by asking what would happen if young people don’t accept what older people are saying. The reality is, however, that I can’t do anything about people not accepting what I say. I consider myself fortunate if there’s just one or two people who accept what I have to say.

Kang’s Prospects for “Post-Unification” and the Tasks Ahead for Historians in Both Koreas

Park I have another question for you. I wanted to ask you about prospects for post-unification. I think that an exploration of a practical model for the unification movement that allows the two Koreas to coexist was

a critical thread in your research on contemporary Korean history. However, we are still faced with the fact that the two Koreas continue to view history in completely different ways, and it appears that the gap in these views will become a major issue after unification occurs. In your mind, what are the tasks and roles of historians in the two Koreas after unification? Also, if you were to write a “united history” of Korea, what areas would the two Koreas be able to agree on?

Kang In the past, I led a group called the Nambukyôksahakchahyôbûihoe [North South Historical Scholars Association]. I started writing a book that introduced a joint history of the two Koreas. I only wrote part of the book and the project is on hold now but writing such a book is possible. That’s because historians just need to write the facts. The textbooks written in West Germany before Germany was reunified could have been written in East Germany after unification – despite the fact, of course, that unification favored West Germany. The West Germans wrote their history objectively enough that such a thing would have been possible. History just needs to be written with the—was the gist of our efforts to write a joint history of the two Koreas before that project was halted. The group wondered where we needed to start, and we ultimately agreed to start with the March 1 Movement. We also agreed that scholars from the two Koreas should write their own versions of history and then compare, and if there were no issues then we were to continue our work. We ultimately had to stop the project, however. On a personal level, however, I feel like this kind of issue [writing a joint history] can be easily solved once unification happens.

Chung However, won’t the two sides emphasize different areas of history? I think that ancient or medieval history could be relatively easy for the two sides to

agree on, but modern and contemporary history would be more difficult. For example, in an area of history where you have contributed a great deal—the national liberation movement—South Korean scholars can now write about the rightists and the leftists in the history of the movement and even broach the theme of a united national front. However, the problem is that North Korea focuses exclusively on Kim Il Sung’s anti-Japanese guerrilla activities during the Japanese occupation period. The question, of course, would be whether that is acceptable. And, then, after liberation, there’s the question of how to confirm the justifications used to write the history of how the establishment of the two Koreas came about.

Kang I think it will work if we abide by one principle. We must write about modern and contemporary history as it really was. If we write the facts, then there becomes no reason to talk about “justifications” in history textbooks. We just must write the facts as they were in both South Korea and North Korea after liberation. I don’t think that’s difficult. That’s what happens with history relating to the independence movement, is it not? Scholars on both sides of the 38th Parallel are writing about the Manchu guerrilla units and the provisional government and even the independence movement inside Korea. I don’t think it’s a difficult issue. Historians just need to stick to the facts.

Park I have a related question for you. One of the most central reasons that the Korean Peninsula hasn’t unified is because of the Korean War, in my opinion. I think that unification shouldn’t just focus on putting one country divided back to together but can only come about when the xenophobia and feelings of confrontation among the people on both sides are healed. Efforts aimed at getting past those feelings of confrontation will need to continue after unification. However, many people believe that history is the

memory of the past. In my estimation, that's where the issue is. The memories of the past are what drive the two Koreas [toward conflict] and, particularly in the case of the Korean War, memories of the war continue to fan the flames of confrontation and hatred toward each other. In your opinion, what is the role of historical studies in pushing both sides to use history to help understand the painful past suffered by both sides?

Kang What I have long focused on and what I want to do in the future, if possible, is related to the North South Historical Scholars Association. To give a specific example, there was an investigation into the cultural artifacts Japan had taken from North Korea at a point when the two countries were looking at perhaps establishing relations. If political conditions allow it in the future, I want to help bring together university students from both sides to visit historical sites or restart the North South Historical Scholars Association to share research created by both sides. If the political conditions allow it, I think that all of this will be possible.

Park I have one last formal question for you. You seem to have been on a journey your entire academic life to unify the Korean Peninsula. I wanted to ask what other plans you have for the remainder of your life.

Kang The most important thing I want to do is bring about academic exchanges and cooperation between the North and South. I think that's the most worthwhile thing to do and what I really want to do. The political conditions, however, have not allowed it thus far. I want to go to North Korea again. I want to meet North Korean scholars I have not yet met, and I want to see the books I sent them. There's a lot I want to do. There's a lot to do as an historian.