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Series.

*Retch'ŭ t'ongil: ch'iyu-wa t'onghap* [Let's Unify!  
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## Whom Should We Blame for Division?

Recently, I attended an academic conference on Korean studies. As it was an academic conference held abroad, people of various nationalities who majored in Korean studies attended; among them, North Korean scholars were also in attendance. A North Korean scholar led the conference, and South Korean scholars presented examples of unification education they had conducted. I was nodding my head throughout the presentation when the North Korean scholar leading the conference flushed and asked the first question during the debate: “Whom should we blame for the division?”

The North Korean scholar asked the presenter what appeared to be a question, but the question was only rhetorical. The predetermined answer was that it was the fault of the United States. Although the presenter said that the humanities-based education for unification is important for elementary, middle, and high school students in South Korea, the North Korean scholar denied that such education is important and continued to emphasize that students should be educated that the division is due to the United States.

Listening to the North Korean scholar propelled me to consider what he was arguing. Of course, Korea may have become a divided country due to the foreign power against which no resistance proved fruitful. On the other hand, when South Korean elementary, middle, and high school students are provided with the education that Korea was divided by foreign powers, will they say that the two Koreas should unify? This question is also rhetorical. If students living in South Korea were taught this origin of the division, most students would say that unification is not necessary. This is because they do not sense the need for unification either emotionally or intellectually. In addition, including this type of education only increases the compulsory education, which no one really wants. Accordingly, we have to consider the following problem carefully; how do we talk about peace and unification to children, who are obviously neither of the generation that experienced the war nor of the generation that was directly affected by those who experienced the war?

## Beginning from Peace

Persuading young children that the two Koreas must unify is extremely difficult. For elementary school students, in particular, unification is not a concept that they find meaningful in any visceral way, and the necessity for unification is not easily graspable. It is not as though children would accept unification just because the idea is forced upon them.

However, it is quite encouraging that children can see the atmosphere of inter-Korean reconciliation on TV, at least through the scenes of frequent inter-Korean summits and exchanges. The current atmosphere of the two Koreas serves as an opportunity whereby the feeling of peace can be cultivated among young children. It is an era in which children can think and imagine specifically about a peaceful Korean Peninsula, and based on this, can be educated about what unification would specifically look like. In line with the demands of the times, that the *Let's Unify!* series addresses peace as the first step toward unification is a promising start to help young children feel positive about and familiar with unification.

## Drawing the Feelings of Peace

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “peaceful”? Let’s think about the state or the mood of “peace in the setting of everyday life” and express it in a simple picture. When is the most peaceful time of the day you look forward to?

In the *Let's Unify!* series, the beginning of unification is not focused on security or system-oriented unification education, but rather on peace and feelings about peace that are easily accessible from the perspective of elementary school students. It also allows elementary school students who have difficulty

writing to express their feelings through pictures. It starts to talk about unification through the concept of “peace” so that elementary school students can imagine unification personally rather than see it as a task for the political circle or the president.

In such a way, *Let's Unify!* consists of learning the value of peace in everyday life and developing a sensitivity toward peace. It also propels the two Koreas to consider the direction of true communication by viewing differences with parity. In the end, the series shows that the path to unification is not distant, that it starts from “me.”

## Four Steps toward Unification

The characteristic structure *Retch'ü t'ongil: p'yönghwa-wa sot'ong* [Let's Unify! Peace and Communication] and *Retch'ü t'ongil: ch'iyu-wa t'onghap* [Let's Unify! Healing and Integration], textbooks for elementary school students, is notable. Each chapter is composed of the following four stages: “Knock, Knock! Let's Get Closer,” “Aha! Let's Discover,” “Let's Do It Together!” and “Step-by-Step! Moving Forward.” The books are easily accessible at a glance.

The first step is “Knock, Knock! Let's Get Closer,” the first step of unification whereby various ideas are gathered to provide easy access to topics related to peace, communication, healing, and integration. It consists of not only the concepts of peace, communication, and division, but also stories told by people, such as that of Utoro Village. Above of all, however, “Knock, Knock! Let's Get Closer” is meaningful in that it gives the students topics to consider on their own. It is not a way for teachers to directly deliver knowledge to elementary school students who come into contact with the textbooks, but rather to make them think about important concepts or situations. Moving beyond the mere knowledge transfer-based education, it encourages students to satisfy their curiosity and find answers first before expanding their thoughts to connect them with the knowledge they learn later.

In particular, “The Story of Utoro Village” is one that

provides a more comprehensive view of the concept of division and the Korean people. When elementary school students think of division, they can perhaps only think that people in the two Koreas live apart. However, “The Story of Utoro Village” allows students to expand the concept of division and the Korean people on their own by understanding the diaspora of the Korean people.

The second step is “Aha! Let’s Discover,” which is a step to acquire basic knowledge and understand the issues of the topic. This is the part whereby the existing knowledge is interconnected with what students have previously considered on their own. Thinking about a concept or meaning on their own does not directly lead to knowledge. Elementary school students should be helped to organize and conceptualize their own concerns. “Aha! Let’s Discover” does not only convey organized knowledge through writing, but also helps elementary school students to gain a deeper understanding through cartoons, pictures, maps, and diagrams.

In particular, the textbooks help students obtain knowledge of peace from diverse angles, such as the word “peace” in various languages, as well as the symbols of peace such as olive branches and pigeons. For example, the books relate that in Korean, the word “peace” denotes calm and harmony, but in English, it refers to a state wherein small nations do not fight one another because of the dominance of powerful nations, and in Arabic, it is a greeting with peace that permeates the heart and mind. Accordingly, the books are organized to help children understand peace in various ways by allowing them to compare the meaning of peace they think of themselves in “Knock, Knock! Let’s Get Closer” to the meaning of peace already defined by different nations.

The third step is “Let’s Do It Together!” which aims to create an autonomous process that evokes emotional empathy and free imagination. After elementary school students themselves have thought about the issue and have gained knowledge based on so doing, they require the process of embodying them. This is the step that enables the internalization of what the students have considered and studied thus far.

To internalize peace, communication, healing, and integration, “Let’s Do It Together!” notably incorporates the concept of play. For example, it offers specific play methods such as “Bingo Games to Understand the Life and Culture of North Koreans” and “Role Play in which People from North and South Meet,” which help students learn through the body. These methods are intended to meet the capacities of elementary school students to help their thought processes through the basic concept of playing.

The fourth step is “Step-by-Step! Moving Forward,” the last step to think more deeply and widely based on what the students have studied together. After students internalize peace, communication, healing, and integration, they need to consider ways to put what they have internalized to practice. This final step presents specific situations for students to implement what they have learned and allows them to imagine practical measures on their own within specific situations given.

Examples of practices that suggest ways to become “we” rather than “I” include “Sending Invitations to North Korean Friends,” “Writing lyrics for Arirang that the Koreans Can Sing Together,” and “Imagining Unification Day.” This step is organized to encourage students to explore all the ways that the divided Korean people can gather to enjoy something together and to allow students to put them to practice themselves.

The four stages that are the main points of the *Let’s Unify!* series do not end at merely being the compositional structure of the textbooks. “Knock, Knock! Let’s Get Closer,” “Aha! Let’s Discover,” “Let’s Do It Together!” and “Step-by-Step! Moving Forward” are also in line with the steps of the efforts we must undertake toward unification. Unification is possible only when the two Koreas approach each other, get to know each other, be with each other, and move forward together in any field including society, politics, and economy. The textbooks can be said to help elementary school students steadily build steps for unification by saturating the content with such principles of unification.

# People-to-People Unification

The relationship between South Korea and North Korea is like friends who had a bad fight with each other. Though they spent seventy years looking at each other face to face, they hurt each other and sometimes missed each other throughout the seventy years.

Placing friends who no longer talk to each other in one physical space does not restore the relationship. Putting the two in the same space will only create ways for them to hurt each other's feelings and increase their hatred. Making them shake hands unconditionally and apologize without confirming what ultimately caused the conflict between the two will not eliminate the conflict.

Therefore, the unification we hope for should not just end with the integration of two different countries and systems. For more than seventy years, the two Koreas have been hurting each other, building inveterate feelings of fear, vigilance, and hatred. It is also true that as time goes by, feelings of longing for each other disappear, and only feelings of hatred are conveyed to the younger generations. Thus, *Let's Unify!* focuses on people rather than on historical consciousness, unification from a religious point of view, or unification from a political perspective as is the case with existing textbooks on unification.

Unification is at once a problem of unifying the divided nation and a long-term process of integration: that of meeting and communicating with people who will co-exist, healing each other's pain, and creating a better world with respect for each other. As such, the dream of peaceful unification is not just a matter for politicians or adults. It can be a story for which everyone living on this land imagines the possibilities of a new future together; it can be a story that everyone creates, one by one.

When people still experience fear, hostility, and alienation toward each other, a unification of the systems cannot be seen



as proper unification. This is also a problem that can be seen through the case of German reunification in the textbooks. When peaceful coexistence of the two Koreas to tear down the metaphorical wall in people's minds, understanding each other through communication, and efforts toward healing lead to integration, such can be called "unification of people." It is crucial that unification of the two Koreas be a "unification of people," which breaks down the psychological barriers between the South and the North, and *Let's Unify!* can be said to aim toward such a "unification of people."

## To Whom Do We Owe Unification?

I once asked a child what unification is. The child replied, "Going on a trip to Mt. Kūmgang."

When I first heard the response, I laughed. Unification is an intense, grave subject because the two systems effected by the division become integrated; I internally criticized the child, thinking he can only consider unification so lightly. Now that I think about it, however, it is right to equate unification with sightseeing at Mt. Kūmgang. Unification of people means that the places that used to be exclusive to the other side becomes "our" space to which we can come and go freely. Unification of people is the formation of a space where people can encounter one another naturally.

From a child's perspective, unification is not so difficult, but it may be rendered difficult because adults transmit their hatred to children. In such a case, unification education should not proceed based on the system and political stance; the shortcut to unification may be to help children fully express their feelings and thoughts about unification. Unification is possible because of children, and the *Let's Unify!* series provides a map that allows children a deeper exploration of their thoughts that would enable unification. I hope that the village of unification will be waiting at the end of the map the children discover.