

An Interview with Jeong Se-hyun

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Interviewer: Kim Sung-Min

Unification of the Korean Peninsula and the International Context

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Interviewee: Jeong Se-hyun (Director of Korea Peace Forum, Director of the Hankyoreh Foundation for Reunification and Culture, Director of the Institute for Peace and Cooperation, Former Unification Minister)

Interviewer: Kim Sung-Min (Institute of Humanities for Unification, Konkuk University)

Thoughts on Korean Unification by the Minister of Unification and Awareness of the Problematics of Unification

Kim Sung-Min

Our Institute of Humanities for Unification conducts unification research centered on people and the humanities. This time, we planned special dialogues with Korean intellectuals and scholars regarding unification of the Korean peninsula. Now I'd like to ask you, Minister, the first question. Looking at the different tenures of the Unification Ministers, I see something interesting. Minister, you are the only Unification Minister who served in the position under two consecutive administrations, namely the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations. In this regard, I would love to hear briefly about your thoughts during your tenure as Minister.

Jeong Se-hyun

Well, because I have had a long experience in the field, my tenure has allowed me to talk a little bit about inter-Korean relations with the focus on the “field” rather than on “theory.” Anyway, you asked me to share how I felt about working for two administrations. First of all, there have been times when inter-Korean relations deteriorated and completely strained, but there have also been times when they improved a little. I think it was a great blessing in some ways to work as the Unification Minister during the so-called “Golden Time,”

when inter-Korean relations improved the most expediently.

I believe that depending on the direction of the president's policy toward North Korea and how the president tries to improve relations with the North, the roles of the various people, including the Unification Minister as well as those who have just begun to work for the Ministry, differ significantly. For example, didn't the Lee Myung-bak administration cease the Mt. Kūmgang tours immediately after the Park Wang-ja shooting incident? Soon after, inter-Korean relations began to strain sharply. Furthermore, the Park Geun-hye administration near its end completely shut down the Gaesong Industrial Complex, citing as the rationale the nuclear testing and long-range missile launch on January 6 and February 7 of 2016, respectively. I think it would have been very difficult to serve as Minister or Vice-Minister of Unification in such times of gravity.

The president's view of North Korea is crucial. During the Kim Young-sam administration, I worked as Secretary to the President for Unification for three years and eight months, but honestly, I couldn't do anything. Why? President Kim Young-sam himself forwarded the theory of the imminent collapse of North Korea. Consequently, we were not able to do much regarding exchange, cooperation, and humanitarian aid that should have been undertaken by the Ministry of Unification, and it was difficult for the policy office and the unification education folks to find proper roles. Then, as the Kim Dae-jung administration came in and instituted its Sunshine Policy, the Ministry of Unification became busy. I believe the timing of holding a certain position may be crucial.

Kim Sung-Min

So, Minister, I suppose it was rather a blessing that you served as Minister of Unification during the administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun.

Jeong Se-hyun

Yes, I agree. As a matter of fact, I do have an anecdote. You know how during the inauguration of President Roh Moo-hyun, former Cabinet members had to be seated behind the president? That's when I first heard the president's inaugural address; perhaps the transition team had seen it, but we didn't

see the inaugural address in advance because we were on our way out. In his speech, President Roh talked about the need to not only inherit and develop the policies of the previous administration, but also renew the way to implement them. I thought to myself how the first Unification Minister of the Roh Moo-hyun administration would have quite a smooth path because the new minister would be taking the same path fostered by the Kim Dae-jung administration for five years, but just with a different proverbial driver. Then maybe it was about two days after that? A number of famous politicians had been mentioned for the post, but toward the end, somehow the media began to mention my name. I thought it was a little strange at first because I had never met President Roh Moo-hyun.

Kim Sung-Min

You had absolutely no connection with President Roh?

Jeong Se-hyun

No, but actually, I had not ever met President Kim Dae-jung before my appointment either. I was appointed to a high-ranking government post by both the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations without ever having met either of the presidents. At any rate, when I was appointed by President Roh, I thought to myself, in face of personnel change in all departments but the Ministry of Unification, that my appointment was certainly a part of President Roh's effort to keep the promise he had made about continuing and developing the previous administration's policy on North Korea. I felt the weight of the responsibility, thinking that I should take my appointment not only as a personal honor, but as a message from the president that I should work as hard as I can to revitalize inter-Korean relations.

The most representative of the work I focused on was that I began in earnest to explain to the public about inter-Korean relations and our policies toward North Korea. Regarding North Korea policy, a kind of "South-South" conflict had become commonplace. In order to develop inter-Korean relations, economic support or exchange and cooperation with North Korea are inevitable, but the critics would call what we did "mindless giving," and if we negotiated flexibly, they'd say that we were "being dragged

around by North Korean manipulation.” This was (and is) the core notion of the so-called South–South conflict, so I put significant efforts into explaining our policies directly and actively to the Korean people to overcome such criticisms. I named it the “Open Forum on Unification” and travelled to the provinces after inter-Korean talks, whether they be done on a ministerial level or on a vice-ministerial level. Through the organizational networks of the National Unification Advisory Council, I met local opinion leaders to explain the government's policies toward North Korea.

Kim Sung-Min

You went in personal to explain the policies to them?

Jeong Se-hyun

Yes, I did, but I didn't go alone, but with the directors of inter-Korean dialogue, policy, or exchange and cooperation. I talked about general matters, and the directors were in charge of the details. For example, I would say, “If you have any questions about the operation of the inter-Korean talks, ask the director of the talks directly, and if you have any questions about North Korea policy, ask the policy director directly.” In a way, I could do that because I was confident. After doing so (I did not immediately investigate the approval rating for our North Korea policy, but) I understand that public opinion itself sympathized with the direction the government was trying to take. In retrospect, it seems to have been a good approach.

Kim Sung-Min

Yes, I think it was so, but you emphasize the importance of explaining North Korea policy to the Korean public, and I want to hear more about why you think so. As you said, the theme of North Korea is a direct factor in the South–South conflict, which in some ways renders unconfident and self-doubting the policymakers and researchers related to North Korea and the pertinent issues.

Jeong Se-hyun

For example, if the government presents an education policy or a real estate policy, there will be criticisms or counterarguments against it, and the government will go through the process of collecting or accepting them in a manner akin to a public hearing. However, opinions on North Korea policy and inter-Korean relations are peculiarly

always fifty-fifty. Isn't it fundamental to set the policy in the direction that flatters the majority of the nation? It's a kind of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," based on the utilitarian approach. But there is no majority regarding North Korea policy because there are two ideological camps. A sober analysis shows that the ideological orientation of the Korean people is considered to be 2:6:2 based on the distinction among conservatives, moderates, and liberals. Then, the ability, or the lack thereof, to turn more than half of the 60 percent (moderates) to one's side is what determines the success or failure of a policy. So if a liberal administration steps up to pursue a progressive policy, the conservatives are against it from the beginning. On the contrary, if a conservative government enters and pushes ahead with its policy, the liberals are opposed from the beginning. So, the approval rating for the policy changes to 51:49 or 60:40, depending on whether more than 50 percent of the 60 percent in the middle of the political spectrum is on its side. Kwon Ogi, the former president of *Dong-A Ilbo*, who was the last minister of the Ministry of Unification of the Kim Young-sam administration, told me that.

Three Factors to Consider in Dealing with the Issue of Unification

Kim Sung-Min

I agree that the role of the Unification Minister largely depends on the president's leanings, such as the president's unification policy and view of North Korea. What you said is, in fact, naturally relevant to the second question. Looking back, none of the former Unification Ministers made such frequent appearances through the Internet and on radio as well as TV as you did. Given that inter-Korean relations, namely, overcoming the division and unification of the Korean peninsula, are existential problems that each and every person residing on the Korean peninsula is supposed to face, I thought it would be wise to provide various pieces of information on inter-Korean relations to many citizens "to the extent that is possible." I wonder what you think about your own activities, as you became and remained the "familiar"

minister through the media.

Jeong Se-hyun

Speaking from the perspective of someone who is also studying the unification issues, there are three essential factors to consider in terms of unification policy or North Korea policy. First, it's the people. A policy that the people do not support is unviable. Second, it's North Korea. Even if 100 percent of the public supports a given policy, it is useless if North Korea opposes it. We need to reach an agreement that is suitable or worth trying at least in the eyes of North Korea. Third, when the first and the second factors are satisfied, this can lead to international support. But the activities I engaged in earlier were related to the most important issue, i.e., national support.

You know, there is something crucial in what North Korean agent Eom Chul-woo tells Kwak Chul-woo, the senior secretary for foreign affairs and security in the movie *Kangch'ölbi* [Steel rain]: "People in a divided country suffer more from those who use division for political gain than from the division itself." That's precisely it. There are people who benefit as a result of the continuation of the divided peninsula or the continuation of hostile relations with North Korea. I believe that those who benefit from the division belong to the 20 percent mentioned earlier, and so it is important to make 60 percent of the people in the middle come quickly to one's side to minimize resistance. I thought that the voices of those who benefit from the division should be rendered useless, so I worked hard toward that end. However, the 20 percent still exist. After all, the Ministry of Unification should do the job of pulling the 60percent to its side, but with the burden of the inter-Korean talks, it is just too much. It appears that there just isn't the kind of mental space necessary to pull the moderates toward the current North Korea policy.

I am digressing a little here, but now that inter-Korean relations, which have been cut off for nine years, are about to resume, the ability to cope with the talks is significantly reduced. There aren't too many people with the requisite experience. In fact, during the Kim Dae-jung administration, there had only been a five-year absence. Throughout the Roh Tae-woo administration, prime ministerial talks were held

to create the “Basic Inter-Korean Agreement (Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between South and North Korea)” and the “Joint Declaration of South and North Korea on the Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,” and more than forty inter-Korean talks were held just in 1992. There were a series of military talks, ministerial talks, and vice-ministerial talks under prime ministerial talks. However, the current nine-year gap is quite significant: a gap of nine years when the relationship between the two Koreas was completely severed and almost hostile. Since inter-Korean relations have been deteriorating, it will take some time to restore them, and only thereafter will there be political leeway to explain the North Korea policy to the public. What worries me is whether the people will wait until then. Nevertheless, I think that once we get back on track even just by a little bit, we have to promote ourselves to the public and we can do so, directly approaching the public, yet again.

Kim Sung-Min

I have a question related to what you just said. I think it is more important for the dialogue between the two Koreas to proceed continuously and responsibly. I would be grateful if you could share which topics should be added to inter-Korean dialogues on unification issues.

Jeong Se-hyun

First of all, I think we must hold military talks. I hypothesize that North Korea will also actively participate in them. North Korea came to Pyeongchang on the condition of postponing the U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises, so wouldn't North Korea want this postponement to be continued? If the joint exercises continue to be postponed, they will effectively cease, because the U.S. military deployed around the world runs its exercises throughout the year, similar to the tightly packed performance schedule of a wandering performance troupe. So if one wants to schedule the joint drills in the gap, one has to either reduce the drills or skip them altogether this year. North Korea will be very active in military talks because it wants to use the opportunity to induce significant changes in the U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises. In addition, the military talks must produce some results on their own

to be able to contribute to the rest of the inter-Korean reconciliation and cooperation policies that our government seeks to pursue. North Korea's cooperation with our policy is ultimately good for North Korea, but in terms of the cost and benefit for the two Koreas, in other words, the return-on-investment, the effect is much greater for us, South Korea, than it is for North Korea.

We need to draw appropriate measures going beyond symbolic gestures. In order to do so, we need to closely cooperate with the U.S. and make the U.S. willing to cooperate with us, and to enable this, we need to offer something to the U.S. because nothing is free. I'm not sure if it's going to start with the FTA or with the minimum maintenance of our involvement in the arms market. Buying weapons from the U.S. means, externally, not slowing down our guard against North Korea and continuing the pressure on North Korea, but we have to explain to North Korea that we have to take care of the interests of the U.S. regarding the U.S.–South Korea joint military exercises. We need to talk to North Korea about these things openly, which will be made possible with just a little trust built between the two Koreas.

The second issue is about separated families. Helping the separated families reunite has been the project that previous administrations prioritized in inter-Korean relations. Didn't even the military dictatorship in the 1970s try to attract political support from the Korean people by holding Red Cross talks for the reunion of the separated families? In a way, inter-Korean relations have been used as an important means of furthering domestic political agenda in South Korea. From this point of view, there is much room for political abuse of inter-Korean relations, but in any case, the issue of separated families was the most important issue in previous administrations. The Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations also made great efforts to resume the separated family reunions. But they didn't think about the expenses needed to execute the family reunion project. By "expenses," I don't mean just money. From North Korea's point of view, family reunions increase the risk posed to the North Korean system. The reunions create an atmosphere wherein the discrepancy between the systems

of the two Koreas is clearly visible through, for example, the clothes the people wear, the state of nutrition evidence by the participants' faces, and so on. What's more, the South Korean families give money to their North Korean families no matter what the cost. In 2000, for example, I promised North Korea that no one would be allowed to give more than \$500 because North Korea wanted it that way, but when one can see that one's family is poor and struggling, does this kind of limitation ever really work? South Korean families bring 5,000 dollars, even 10,000 dollars, and secretly gave it to their North Korean families. The North Koreans who met their separated families in the South have dollars, so they could purchase expensive items in the market; North Koreans who saw that probably thought, "Hey, it must be great to have family in the South." Wouldn't this be an obvious opportunity to think that South Korea is economically much better off than North Korea, and eventually change the North Koreans' perception of South Korea? Because of this, the North pays great attention to even the selection phase of separated families.

Kim Sung-Min

That must be right. I understand that North Korea also executes thorough background checks and makes the selected people undergo some kind of special training.

Jeong Se-hyun

Even when people are asked first if they are willing to meet their families in South Korea and they respond, "Yes," those who are deemed too unseemly in appearance cannot be selected. Would those who defected to the South think about the extent of the suffering the family members they left behind up in the North must be enduring and think of North Korea as a terrible regime? Would the families left in North Korea wonder how it is that they are so shabby in North Korea, poorly clothed and hungry, and why even the older family members who fled to the South look much younger than they do? They may perhaps begin to question the state of affairs in North Korea. How much burden is this to the North Korean system? So, there should be a countermeasure to offset that, which was rice and fertilizer in the past. Those who do not understand this principle would criticize the work we were doing, asking, "What kind of humanitarian aid

has conditions attached to it?” However, these really didn’t understand the other party at all. The North Koreans are afraid of the family reunions, but there is an international justification for the reunions. If North Korea rejects the reunions, then it will be castigated harshly. So North Korea has to agree to participate in the reunions. Then the countermeasure that can offset the aforementioned burden, of North Korea’s having to risk a threat to its system, must be offered to North Korea “under the table.” If one does not accept this type of reality, then the family reunions cannot be materialized.

For example, when the Lee Myung-bak administration initially proposed talks regarding separated family reunions, North Korea came, anticipating the same *quid pro quo* as in the past. But there wasn’t any. North Korea came the second time, but there still was nothing. As should have been expected, North Korea said, “No,” to the third one. Subsequently, the Park Geun-hye administration was able to hold just two. Since the government cannot talk about this kind of give-and-take principle in inter-Korean relations directly, the unification experts need to actively tell the public that there is a background such as this, toward changing the minds of the conservative folks. The behind-the-scenes story of “no reunions of separated families without the so-called ‘mindless giving’ (so called by the conservatives)” should now be voiced by people at institutions such as the Institute of Humanities for Unification to create positive public opinion regarding the reunion of the separated families. As I said before, the South Korean government cannot speak about this directly.

The third is, after all, the issue of economic cooperation. Other talks will also be affected if there is no return or countermeasure for the U.S.–South Korea joint military exercises at the military talks. North Korea has nothing to gain from the so-called inter-Korean dialogue. North Korea must prepare in face of the U.S.—South Korea joint military exercises, which the North considers the most dangerous to them, and such preparation is a significant budget expenditure for North Korea. In order to increase the extent of separated family reunions and move toward a peace

system between the two Koreas, we need to increase the scale of economic cooperation beyond rice and fertilizer support. However, though I don't know how North Korea has been self-sustaining for the past nine years, I don't think it needs simple assistance anymore. I think North Korea wants us to be involved in cooperative projects; in other words, it wants investments. For example, when North Korea says, "We hope the two Koreas will cooperate in modernizing the loading and discharging facilities of the ports. No, actually, we want you to invest in modernizing the railway," we have to think about how we would respond. There are over twenty designated special economic zones established since the Kim Jong-un regime, but there has been no investment. What should we do when North Korea asks us to invest? Again, we are on the issue of forming a public opinion. This is an albatross.

Hostility of the Division and South–South Conflict, and the Beginning of the Solution

Kim Sung-Min

Moving beyond the political issues, Minister, as you said earlier, it seems that the so-called South–South conflict has surfaced again recently. The problematic of our Institute is premised on the notion that "unification is not just about combining divided countries, but only realistically possible when the exclusivity and hostility engraved in the bodies and minds of people living in both countries are healed." For this reason, adversity of division and healing thereof are the main themes with which our Institute is concerned. However, as one can glean from the case of German reunification, overcoming the hostility between the two Koreas is likely to be a problematic that will need continuous examination even after unification. Moreover, in reality, hostility between the two Koreas is still expanding and being reproduced. I would like to hear your opinion on deepening of such hostility between the two Koreas, and on how such hostility can be resolved.

Jeong Se-hyun

That's right. The two Koreas, which have been divided for seventy years, are severely hostile and insular.

Kim Sung-Min

It's not as simple as it seems, but as one can see in the German reunification case, we still predict that the issue of sociocultural unification will come about in earnest in the future, particularly when we observe the hostility between the two Koreas expanding and being reproduced. This is a difficult problem to deal with, but I would like to ask additional questions about how to minimize hostility and loathing between the two Koreas in terms of unification and peace education.

JJeong Se-hyun

Yes, as you said, we are now moving on to the question of unification education, which is not an easy topic. I've heard from my friends or juniors with university teaching positions that, these days, young students have an extremely strong anti-North Korean sentiment. So my friends and juniors at universities are worried about what they should do with unification education because there is no point in talking about such matters as the justification of unification. Their students in fact openly question why the two Koreas should unify and object to the established rationales for unification.

In unification education, the legitimacy of unification is always brought up, and is explained by historical necessity: we are the same Korean people sharing the same blood line; there still remains the problem of separated families. It's been a long time since the unification of the peninsula by the Silla Kingdom, and it's been a unified state for 1,300 years; it's only been seventy years since the division; for a long time, division was abnormal, and the unified state was normal. However, such narratives have not been viable for quite some time. Now, I think we should persuade students to focus on the benefits of unification vis-à-vis explaining the justification of unification.

Kim Sung-Min

In fact, it seems that more and more young people are viewing unification based on the theory of beneficial unification. South Korea's demographic cliff is expected to bring a gloomy, miserable future. In this situation, many people can be heard protesting, "Who is responsible for the

future of a child who is likely to live as a ‘slave’ in unstable employment, and why would we ever give birth only to fulfill our sense of patriotism?” As a result, it seems that the words of those who argue that only Korean unification is the ultimate solution to the population and economic crises do not sound absurd. Though the emphasis on such a notion in unification education may leave a bit of a bitter taste in the mouth, it is also the most persuasive for Koreans who have for the most part existed as economic beings.

Jeong Se-hyun

Well, then I’m glad to hear that because there is no harm in the notion that if unification is a business that proves profitable, one would be a fool to oppose it. The question, however, is how to overcome the North Korea-loathing and how to persuade the public that unification is desirable because it is ultimately profitable. But in order to talk about the costs and benefits of unification, we need to go back to the days of the Kim Young-sam administration. After the death of Kim Il-sung, the rumor of the collapse of North Korea spread very quickly, and President Kim Young-sam continued to claim, “North Korea’s collapse is not far away.” He was sure it would collapse. And due to this prediction of collapse, the theory of unification by absorption became paramount. But in the case of East and West Germany, reunification took twenty years, so it can’t be called unification by absorption. It was only after twenty years of steady economic support that East Germany chose the West German system. The people of East Germany agreed, “It’s the West German system that will enable us to live well.”

However, using German reunification as an example (though German reunification was not unification by absorption), economists began to calculate the cost of unification. Which country calculated that it would cost the most back then? It was Japan: “The annual cost of Korean unification is the same as Korea’s total annual budget. There is no way for Korea to be able to handle this, so Japan has to help.” But then our own economists started to multiply the Japanese figure by ten, twenty times, claiming that unification would cost even more than Japan’s calculation. What’s more, such calculations were reported by the media without any

filtration at the time. I was Secretary to the President for Unification back then, but there was nothing I could do to stop the said perceptions from spreading.

I personally saw the situation as follows: “First of all, the collapse of North Korea is impossible to materialize for various reasons. Also, the burden of unification by absorption is simply too great.” Some people talked as if unification by absorption was a desirable alternative and started calculating the cost it would engender, which naturally became the premise for the ideology of division; it became the basis for fear and rejection of unification. In the midst of such a milieu, I served as the head of the Korea Institute for National Unification for about two years from 1996 to 1998. Prime Minister Kwon Ogi asked me at a dinner he invited me to, “Dr. Jeong, if the two Koreas unify, then though the cost of unification will be significant, we won’t spend too much money otherwise—for example, the excess expenditure on national defense—right? So why does everyone talk about the cost of unification without subtracting such existing expenditures that will be rendered useless after unification?” Of course I agreed, so upon getting back to the office, I organized research as well as an academic conference, with the economists belonging to our Institute at the core. After that, I invited economists who had predicted the cost of unification to a workshop held in Chungju. There, I said, “You worked hard to calculate the cost of unification, but instead of just emphasizing the cost, don’t you also need to calculate the cost of division? That’s the only way to motivate people to feel at ease about unification. Otherwise, people become frightened of unification when we talk about costs of unification.” The economists wholeheartedly agreed and held an academic conference on both the cost of unification and the cost of division. At the heart of the conference was the notion that the cost of unification is X, but the cost of division is Y. After unification, the cost of division can be converted to unification profits. Someone who went one step further is Professor Shin Chang-Min, who wrote the book *T’ongil-ün taebak-ida* [The road to one Korea: prosperity in peace], which discusses the benefits of unification. Before the book was released, Professor Shin was the first scholar to calculate

both the unification cost and the division cost and conclude that the benefits of unification would be X amount. His argument is that unification cost is worth investing in, and our economy will greatly improve as a result of unification because the benefits of unification are much greater in the relations among the following three factors: unification cost, division cost, and unification benefits. Along with Professor Shin, I emphasized in my lectures, “The profits will come from two to three years after the cost. If our economy grows by 11.25 percent a year, then it will grow by 8–9 percent or more despite the unification cost. This is still significant growth.” Since Professor Shin and I both brought up this idea in our lectures, we were asked to give talks here and there and became quite famous. Thereafter, Professor Shin’s book was released, and a few years later, former President Park Geun-hye said her famous line, “Unification will pay off big-time.”

Kim Sung-Min

That's where she got the hint.

Jeong Se-hyun

She just borrowed from the title. In fact, I think what she really meant was that North Korea would collapse soon and therefore South Korea needs to absorb North Korea to unify; however, since doing so would cost quite a bit of money, no one should resist taxes. In any case, we need to develop the logic that effectively liaises the three factors of unification cost, division cost, and unification benefits, and approach students with the so-called concept of interest. I don't think we can persuade students with the notion of rightness anymore. In addition, the claim of “Regionally, North Korea is the blue ocean for our economy. Passing through North Korea, we can enter the markets of the whole Manchuria region and Vladivostok,” which is the premise of the Peace Odyssey by the *JoongAng Ilbo*, should be explained in detail with specific numbers.

Outlook on and Future Plans for Unification

Kim Sung-Min

Minister, we read a multitude of books and listen to

numerous talks about Korean unification, but more questions about field practices, policies, and other matters in the future are yet to be answered. And I believe that you will continue to devote yourself to the issue of unification as you do today. In this regard, I would like to hear your plans regarding your academic life and praxis to build peace on the Korean peninsula and, even further, a unified Korean peninsula.

Jeong Se-hyun

Doesn't the age of sixty mean that one has made one complete round of the sexagenary cycle of one's life? Right now, I am on my second lap, but the year after I stepped down from Unification Minister, I turned sixty. It seems to me that a person already has a script written from birth to death, but the person just doesn't know about the script. Even if one dies and is resurrected, even if one does everything possible to run away from the script, one will eventually get dragged back to the predetermined path. On the contrary, one can't do anything that one is not meant to do, no matter what the struggles. For me, the script involved being a career public official on one side and a professor on the other. At that time, I put every ounce of my being into securing a professorship. Despite being overwhelmed by my work as a public official, I published two academic papers a year by sacrificing sleep and gave lectures at various universities until complete exhaustion. May I tell you a kind of comical story? I almost had a chance to become a university professor in 1979. I thought the professorship was a done deal because I had met the objective criteria due to tremendous help from numerous friends and colleagues. But one day, I had a chance to visit a physiognomist. The physiognomist sat down and asked, "You are a public official, right?" Well, I did not like being a public official then and was then trying to escape to academia, so I said, "Yes, that's right, but I am going to leave my public office." In response, the physiognomist said, "Well, I suppose you're someone who deals with extremely dangerous matters" At that time, what he said seemed just right because I was dealing with various documents and materials related to North Korea, which were highly classified. That's why I confessed, "Actually, I'm a civil servant in the Ministry of Unification. In a way, I do deal with dangerous matters, as I

come into contact with dangerous documents all the time. But now I have a chance to escape. Please take a look at how this opportunity will unfold.” The physiognomist replied bluntly, “No, it won’t work. You will never be a professor.” I asked, “What will you do if I indeed do become a professor?” Then the physiognomist said, “If you become a professor, I will burn my own hands.” Ultimately, my opportunity to become a professor didn’t work out that year, and a few years later, a chance at another university also didn’t pan out. Even though all of my acquaintances said, “Dr. Jeong, it will definitely work out this time,” it didn’t.

After that, I began to work at a research institute, thinking that it wasn’t in my cards to become a professor. I had in fact wanted to work at a research institute to write and present research freely. So I joined the Sejong Institute. Afterwards, when the Korea Institute for National Unification was established, I assumed the position of its Vice President. Then I was employed as a presidential secretary at the Blue House, becoming a public official again. Thereafter, I became Vice-Minister and then finally Minister. It is because I went back to being a public official that I could serve as Minister twice under two presidents. You asked me if I have any plans. Having lived more than sixty years, it seems to me that the script of my life has been decided. Now, I don’t think that I will be able to do something just because I work hard at it, or won’t do something even though I try not to do it. So honestly, I don’t have any plans. I say this to my juniors these days: “Don’t harbor uselessly grand ambitions. You can run and you can hide, but what will be will be. And if it won’t be, then no matter what you do, even if you kowtow to power to build bridges, it just won’t be. As academics, just be academics. Walk your own path silently.”

Kim Sung-Min

You mentioned you have seen the movie *Kangch’ölbi*. In that movie, there is a scene in which President Kim Dae-jung is symbolically represented. There’s a frame with the phrase “Conscience in Action,” and the president-elect emerges. In the last scene, the person introduced as the new Unification Minister shakes hands with the representative of North Korea.

Jeong Se-hyun

That's right. Unification Minister Jung Se-young. (Laughter)

Kim Sung-Min

Right. So, it seemed to me that everyone would see that the president-elect is President Kim Dae-jung and Unification Minister Jung Se-young is in fact you. What did you think watching the scene?

Jeong Se-hyun

Well, I don't know the name of the incumbent president in the movie, but he keeps calling the president-elect *hyōng* (literally, "older brother"), right? In reality, President Kim Dae-jung was one or two years older than President Kim Young-sam. Also, I initially thought the character who follows around the president-elect is the secretary, but in the latter part of the movie, this character turned out to be Unification Minister. Then he shakes hands, introducing himself as follows: "I am Unification Minister Jung Se-young." So I thought the name Jung Se-young, though not Jeong Se-hyun, was a name that must have been marked on people's consciousness as a name related to the Ministry of Unification: in fact, when one combines the names Jeong Se-hyun and Chung Dong-young, then one arrives at Jung Se-young. I watched the movie because people told me I should watch it, but what I remember the most from the movie is another scene. In the scene, which I mentioned earlier, Eom Chul-woo tells Kwak Chul-woo, "People in a divided country suffer more from those who use division for political gains than from the division itself." I think this is the key message of the movie.

Kim Sung-Min

Well, it's time to wrap up the conversation now. Thank you very much for sharing your wisdom and experiences with us through this long dialogue.