

Pak Han-shik, *P'yŏnghwa-e mich'ida*
[Crazy about Peace] (Seoul: Samin, 2021).
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Is it appropriate to call myself a peace academic and peace activist? Should I even be using the title I have placed on this very article, “Professor Emeritus, Peace Studies,” anymore? These thoughts went through my mind as I read Pak Han-shik’s *P’yŏnghwa-e mich’ida* [Crazy about peace], published in 2021.

I was first made aware of Pak as a “peace mediator.” He brought about former U.S. President Jimmy Carter’s visit to North Korea in 1994, preventing a war breaking out between the U.S. and the DPRK. Pak arranged former U.S. President Bill Clinton’s visit to North Korea in 2009, preventing a deterioration of relations between the two countries once again. He was also known to me as a “North Korea expert” after finding out, through his 2018 book *Sŏn-ül nŏmŏ saenggak-handa: nam-gwa puk-ül kallononnŭn 12 kaji p’yŏn’gyŏn-e kwanhayŏ* [Thinking beyond the line: considering 12 biased opinions about why the North and South is divided], that he has been a long-time researcher of the country who visited the DPRK some 50 times.

When the chapters in the book were serially published in the daily newspaper Hankyoreh from 2019 to 2020, I occasionally read some of them, with interest but without being much impressed. However, as I perused through them in a book format I learned that Pak had experienced the Chinese Civil War in the 1940s along with the Korean War in the 1950s and that, after catching the “peace bug” during his childhood, he has spent his entire life crazed with peace while serving as a “peace scholar-cum-peace activist.” It provided me a great deal of learning and insights.

I have devoted myself to peace studies and served as a unification-peace activist, and I was particularly impressed with Pak’s emphasis on page 327 of the book, which reads, “My lifetime creed toward academia is to solve problems. I believe that the aim of learning and the calling of scholars are to uncover the large and small issues facing society, find their causes, and present solutions.” Calling himself a “scholar designing unification,” he also makes a revolutionary suggestion for a unification model centered on “one nation, two states, and three governments,” along with the establishment of a “unification and peace university” (pp.

366–371).

There is nothing new about the idea of “one nation, two states,” given that the idea has been around from the start of Korean division to this very day. What is less familiar is the idea of “a third government,” which Pak defines as “a new, experimental type of government that, by closing the gap between the two Koreas to make them more homogeneous, constructs an ideal, unified community.” Pak goes on to explain that while the third government “does not hold authority over diplomacy, defense or any other powerful arena, it would be a low-level type of federal government that, surpassing the authority held by the Inter-Korean Liaison Office, would exercise the legislative, judicial, and administrative functions and authority over independent, sovereign territory” (p. 366).

Pak argues that preparing for unification requires the creation of a “university for unification and peace.” While it would be desirable to establish this university in the Demilitarized Zone, that would be challenging without agreement from the UN Command. This leads Pak to propose that it be built under the agreement of both Koreas in Kaesŏng. He proposes the establishment of five colleges in this university to contribute to the “philosophical removal of division culture and the creation of a new unification culture that can replace it.” He defines these five colleges as follows: (1) a “College of Health,” which imaginatively teaches the Western medicine of south Korea and the Koryo Medicine of north Korea; (2) an “Arts College” aimed at bringing harmony to the differences between the two Koreas; (3) a “Politics and Economics College” that creatively meshes the capitalism of South Korea and the socialism of North Korea to bring a new definition of distribution to people’s lives; (4) a “College of the Humanities” that creatively harmonizes the material-focused culture of South Korea with the ideology-focused culture of North Korea with a view to preparing for cultural unification; and (5) an “Ecological Environment College” aimed at bringing forth organic symbiosis between humans and the environment (pp. 370–371).

“Learning about America in America”

In the section of Pak’s book, titled, “Miguk-esö paeun miguk” (Learning about America in America), I was struck by his realization of the fact that “America’s history is the history of war” and that he points to America’s two “original sins” as the ultimate causes of this fact. Like me, Pak’s true calling as a scholar is, as he emphasizes in the book, to identify causes rather than just be cognizant of a particular phenomenon. He argues that America’s racism, derived from slavery, has been combined with the militarism, derived from “conquering the Indians,” ceaselessly driving the U.S. to wars (pp. 130–131). I have studied America in the U.S. and have long criticized America’s belligerence and thus wholeheartedly agree with his assessment. If I were to find fault with what he says, I would say that the “massacre of indigenous peoples” rather than the “conquering of the Indians” is a more accurate phrase.

I have long argued the following: “The U.S. is the most warlike country in history. There has never been a country like the U.S. that has conducted so many wars, nor liked war so much, nor been so good at it. The country was built on war and expanded its territory through war. It became a superpower through war and has long maintained its supremacy through war. America has never stopped engaging in war over its 245-year history from its declaration of independence in 1776 to 2021, except for a brief period of 20 years.” Pak’s friend, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, said something similar in a Newsweek article published in 2019: Carter noted that the U.S. has constantly “stayed at war,” only enjoying “16 years of peace” in its 242-year history. This, the former U.S. president said, makes the country “the most warlike nation in the history of the world.”

In regards to America’s “original sins,” Pak interestingly points out that the practice of tipping taxi drivers and restaurant servers seems to originate from the country’s system of slavery. He shares several stories, including one during his time studying abroad in the U.S. where he worked as a restaurant server and monopolized all the tips. Knowing

that the other middle-aged and slower female servers were unhappy about this, he displayed a “socialist mentality” by proposing and implementing an equal distribution of tips collected by all employees. Another story has him returning a 20-dollar tip left by a Korean professor, much more than the price of the meal, as he felt it as a debasement of his human dignity (pp. 103–105).

Pak makes a claim in the book that I find it hard to agree with. He states on page 56, “The U.S. thoroughly implemented a trusteeship in South Korea, unlike the USSR.” There seems to be quite a few people who think that the U.S. imposed a trusteeship in South Korea from 1945 to 1948; however, I have long argued that the U.S. imposed a military government on the South for those three years after Liberation, not a trusteeship. At the latest, the U.S. envisioned a trusteeship for the Korean Peninsula starting in 1943. From that time, U.S. leaders prepared to impose a trusteeship for at least 20-30 years or even 40-50 years at the most. A trusteeship period of five years was decided upon during the Moscow Conference of the Three Foreign Ministers in December of 1945 due to the Soviet’s opposition or, at the very least, that country’s passive support. That being said, the end of the Joint Soviet-American Commission meant that a trusteeship was never imposed in either Korea.

There is also a part of Pak’s text that intrigued me. Pak writes about the massacre of civilians by the American army during the Korean War in Shinch’ön, Hwanghae-do province. He made several trips to the Shinch’ön Museum of American War Atrocities and checked with the American Department of Defense (DOD) whether the leader of the massacre, a “Major General Harrison,” existed, but tells readers that he failed to receive a proper response from the DOD (p. 261–262).

I visited the Shinch’ön Museum in 1998 and, on my return, wrote a record of my travels in North Korea to have it widely known in South Korea. I also argued that Picasso’s work, “Massacre in Korea”—which was exhibited in Seoul from April to August 2021—portrayed the Shinch’ön massacre. People who experienced the incident in 1951 claimed that the North Korean authorities had perpetrated the massacre. Writer Hwang Sökyöng, in his 2001 novel, *Sonnim* [The guest],

expressed certainty that the massacre occurred amid conflict between Christian and Communist forces.

At around that same time I visited North Korea, I was asked by a magazine to write an article refuting Hwang's argument, and I said I would do so after I uncovered American military records about the incident. While in New York in 2002, I met with Yu T'aeyŏng, a pastor who was the model of the main character in Hwang's novel. He claimed that Hwang had distorted his story. I have yet to find American military records regarding the massacre. Two years ago when I met with Hwang and spoke with him about this, he was unswerving in his certainty about what happened. Interestingly enough, an "International Civilian Court" concerning America's war crimes, including the Shinch'ŏn massacre, was held on September 8, 2021. I wonder whether Pak can argue with certainty that the Shinch'ŏn massacre was perpetrated by the Americans without referencing any U.S. military records.

"The Path to Understanding the DPRK"

The official names of South and North Korea are the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), respectively. They are frequently referred to as "Korea" (Han'guk) and "North Korea" (Puk'an) in South Korea, while in the North, the two are referred to as "Chosŏn" and "South Chosŏn" (Nam Chosŏn). The names North Korea and South Chosŏn are provocative because they reveal that the two sides do not recognize each other. The names South Korea–North Korea and South Chosŏn–North Chosŏn have "Korea" (or Chosŏn) in common, and thus suggest that the two divided territories will be unified at some point. Meanwhile, the titles "Korea" and "Chosŏn" have no common denominator and thus acknowledge that the two Koreas are independent countries and have no relation to each another. Pak, in his 2018 book, *Sŏn-ŭl nŏmŏ saenggak-handa* [Thinking beyond the line], uses the term "North Korea," while in his autobiography, he uses the term "Chosŏn" to refer to North Korea. It is natural

and reflective of Pak's adherence to objectivity to use this term; however, I wonder what the source of the change was.

I have long argued that understanding Kim Il-sung and the Juche Idea is key to properly understanding North Korea. That is because the DPRK was built by Kim and continues to be ruled under the Juche Idea. In south Korea, however, Kim has continued to be viewed as a "fake," while the Juche Idea has been treated as an "incomplete" ideology only worth criticizing. I have argued that Kim Il-sung created the Juche Idea while Hwang Chang-yŏp made its theoretical underpinnings. Pak, however, says in his book, "The creator of the Juche Idea was Kim Il-sung while the person who implemented it was Kim Jong-il." He also says that he met with Hwang over an eight-year period for discussions on the Juche Idea and that Hwang "intended to spread the Juche Idea throughout the world." Pak makes no mention of the argument that Hwang systemize the idea (pp. 193–196).

I, too, criticized Hwang through a newspaper column when he was preparing for exile in Beijing in 1997. and, again after he had arrived in South Korea, I met with him in a National Intelligence Service safe house in 1998 and criticized his defection and exile. Nevertheless, I think it would be fair to recognize the role that he has played in theorizing the Juche Idea. Pak also does not mention any negative aspects of the Juche Idea. It is good, of course, that the ideology espouses that people are more important than material things and that North Koreans must live independently and autonomously in all spheres, from politics, economics, and ideology to military affairs and diplomacy. However, would it not also be right to criticize the use of the "Suryŏng Theory" to glamorize dictatorship along with the use of the "Successor Theory" to justify hereditary succession?

Many people believe that North Korea will never give up its nuclear weapons. I would like to ask them, however, whether the U.S. has plans to remove its troops in South Korea. In short, I believe that the DPRK will not give up its nuclear weapons unless American troops leave. Yet, in South Korea, the only response to this is that the DPRK "must be denuclearized." Meanwhile, the North Koreans simply call for the "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." Pak gives

clarity to all this, stating, “The denuclearization espoused by the DPRK covers the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the denuclearization of the United States Forces Korea (USFK), and the denuclearization of American nuclear-powered aircraft carriers that appear around the Korean Peninsula” (p. 42). He goes on to argue that the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of North Korea’s nuclear program as demanded by the U.S. “is an unrealistic concept in the world of international politics” (p. 35), and says, “The denuclearization of the DPRK can only happen after political security devices are put into place, such as the establishment of diplomatic ties between the U.S. and the DPRK along with the signing of a multilateral non-aggression treaty” (p. 46).

The part of Pak’s book where he talks about the period surrounding the fall of the Soviet Union was confusing to me. For context, when Eastern Europe began to fall in the 1980s and German unification was achieved in 1990, there was the belief that North Korea could collapse as well. I have always argued that the collapse of the DPRK is not only impossible but also undesirable. I have also provided possible scenarios of how North Korea could collapse, such as the fall of the government, the collapse of the system, and the fall of the state. Pak does not talk about scenarios surrounding North Korea’s collapse in his book; however, he does mention at least three times the fall of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. He expresses this period in different ways throughout his writing, however: On page 108, he calls it the “latter part of 1989,” while on page 113, it is referred to as the “1980s.” Then, on page 337, he refers to the period as happening in “1990.” I have long argued that, while the end of the Cold War may have started in the late 1980s, the USSR did not collapse or fall apart until 1991. As such, I am unclear about what criteria Pak used to refer to 1989 or 1990 as the period of the Soviet Union’s collapse.

Comparing the Systems of the Two Koreas

I have long argued that, because North Korea's collapse and unification by absorption is neither possible nor desirable, the most achievable and desirable scenario for the two Koreas' unification is the one of gradual unification through peaceful coexistence, an alliance, or a federation, as stated in the June 15 Joint Declaration signed during the 2000 Inter-Korean Summit. I have also called for the two Koreas to pursue a welfare state that weds freedom and equality, the respective strong points of capitalism and socialism. In short, I believe that the most desirable system to be pursued by the two Koreas is one modelled off the socialist democratic systems of Northern Europe.

In the place of "capitalism" and "socialism," Pak uses the terms "democracy" and "socialism." For example, on page 94 of the book, he states, "European social democracy accepts the strong points of socialism to make up for the weak points of democracy." On page 106, he further says, "The Cold War divided the world between the spheres of democracy and socialism" while on page 174, he goes on to say, "The DPRK's socialism also contemplated South Korea's democracy."

Many people, from politicians to political scientists, compare the two Koreas by saying that the South Korea is a democratic state while North Korea is a socialist or communist state. I have long said that if you were to boast about South Korea's democracy, you'd call North Korea a dictatorship while, on the flip side, anyone intending to criticize North Korea's socialism would need to call South Korea a capitalist state. In regards to democracy, I have long stated that because South Korea declares it as a "a democratic republic" in the first clause of its constitution while North Korea calls itself a democracy in its official title, comparing the two Koreas on the basis of democracy alone would need more context: namely, South Korea has supported "liberal democracy," which places importance on individual freedom and human rights while North Korea has pursued "people's democracy," which prioritizes "social harmony and equality." When all these considered, it is disconcerting to me that Pak himself,

who has deeply studied political philosophy and political ideology, calls South Korea a democracy while referring to North Korea as a socialist state.

