

Remaking a Transborder Nation in North Korea: Media Representation in the Korean Peace Process

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Recently, North Korean media has engendered greater connectedness with the outside world. One important goal of the North Korean regime is to create ties with Koreans living outside the country through its official website. Analyzing media representation of a transborder Korean nation, this article discusses the shifts that have occurred in the recent context of the peace process on the Korean peninsula. I argue that the transborder nation-building in North Korean official media reveals a hybrid form of patriotism and nationalism that juxtaposes loyalty to the nation and loyalty to the state. North Korean media thus emerges as a critical site where the two loyalties coexist, demonstrating an attempt to provide the impression of a whole—albeit divided and dispersed—Korean nation.

Keywords: North Korea, media, nation(alism), Korean nation, globalization, Uriminzokkiri

Recent scholarly interest in transborder nations has addressed various transborder practices linking states to populations residing outside the territories. The literature has largely focused on the relationship between emigration states and labor migrant populations. Yet what about a transborder nation that is a product of division rather than labor emigration? And how can nationhood be represented by a socialist state media in a world of global communication? This article addresses these two issues by (1) incorporating a territorially divided nation—Korea—into the discussion and (2) exploring the representation of a transborder nation by a socialist regime. This approach offers a deeper understanding of the politics of transborder belonging.

This article examines how North Korean media represent a transborder nation amid current political shifts. By comparing the media representation of the Korean nation in the postsummit period with the presummit period, this article suggests that the North Korean regime's communication practices have an ambivalent character as a state and as a nation with the advent of the peace process in 2018.

This article is organized as follows. The next section elaborates how the article builds on existing interdisciplinary literatures. Then I describe the national discourse in North Korea, the context of globalizing

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North Korean media, and the North Korean media's representation of the Korean nation. The analytical sections critically examine the North Korean media representation of the transborder nation in the periods before and after the summit. The conclusion fleshes out the main arguments and highlights the implications of the article.

The Politics of a Transborder Nation

The ideas that nations and nationalism are best understood as modern creations (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990) rather than as given and that the modern nation as a bounded community is socially "imagined" have been widely applied to the literature of nationalism. Every community based on wider links than face-to-face contact is imagined: People who define themselves as members of a nation "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). The modern nation is thus imagined in terms of its ideological constructions seeking to forge a link between a cultural group and a state (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). Further, the modern nation, as "imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1991, p. 6), is an imagined political community. Nation-states are thus presupposed as active agents of this nation-building process (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1990) and as the "pre-eminent power-container of the modern era" (Giddens 1985, p. 12). In the case of North Korea, the process of national identity formation has long been performed by the regime's elites.

Identity claims and practices that connect people living outside a national territory are often called "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson, 1992a, 1992b, 1998) or "transborder nationalism" (Brubaker, 1996). The population of a nation needs to be understood beyond the territorial boundaries of an ancestral land; at the same time, the political focus and center of identity of transborder populations continue to be connected to the territory of their homelands (Anderson, 1992a, 1998). In this sense, a transborder nation is expected to maintain some kind of loyalty to the homeland. Cross-border belonging also exists in the realm of the imagination, and nation-states are deeply involved in creating the diasporic imagination. Therefore, this kind of belonging encompasses nationalism as a project that consists of political movements and state policies through which people seek to act on behalf of the nation with which they identify (Calhoun, 1997; Wimmer, 2019). As Smith (1995) noted, both nationalism and nations "remain indispensable elements of an interdependent world and a mass-communications culture" (p. 160). As it pertains to the process of making the North Korean diasporic belonging a national project beyond the territorial border, media transforms into a contested site in the construction of a Korean nation.

Research on transborder nations has been discussed in the context of transnationalism (Anderson, 1992a; Fuglerud, 1999; Skrbiš, 1999). More recent literature has tended to focus on the ties between emigration states in the South and labor migrant groups in the North (Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2008; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Waldinger, 2015). The adopted framework of current research is embedded in transnational networks, mainly owing to the advent of instantaneous communication and relatively inexpensive air travel, which have spurred new waves of ideas and immigrants and increased flows of goods. Many people today seek their identifications and social alignments along different axes such as cross-border mobilization and transnational loyalties, because capitalism and modern communications technology have relativized the human spatial dimension (Appadurai, 1996). In this process, technologies have allowed

"nationalism" to become "globalized" across national borders, and thus digital media can promote new, alternative forms of national imagination (Conversi, 2012).

The reconstruction of distant homelands is not merely an outcome of recent migrations. In the case of Korea, many transborder nation groups are the product of colonial migration and political division born of the global Cold War.² Further, the national division was not limited to those on the Korean peninsula; it also included Koreans who were colonial migrants and their descendants residing in Japan and China. The division has produced deep tensions. However, at the same time, its strong legacy of ethnic homogeneity has functioned as a unifying force. North Korea, which creates both interethnic conflict and ethnic unity, defies "the nationalist principle of congruence of state and nation" (Gellner, 1983), creating incongruity in both political and ethnic dimensions. This bilevel incongruity, in turn, has produced a new source of identification as political project and has resulted in a contested "politics of representation" between the two Koreas (Shin, Freda, & Yi, 1999).

In North Korea, the representation of a transborder nation as identity politics reflects on the failure to form a single nation-state as well as the incongruities in the political and ethnic dimensions of Korean nationhood. The territorial division into two opposing political entities after 1945 created an additional source of beliefs concerning national identity and the "homeland." Examining the case of North Korea provides a theoretical contribution to our current understanding of the dynamics of transborder nation-building politics. This article illustrates how North Korean media utilizes ethnic and political elements in the construction of transborder belonging amid current political shifts.

National Discourse in North Korea

The term *minjok* in Korea—a translation of the Japanese term *minzoku* (ethnic nation)—in the early 20th century reveals an overlap of race, ethnicity, and nation (Park, 2008; Shin et al., 1999). Historically, various elements, including territorial unity, a shared common language, and culturally unified elites, served as important sources to mobilize ethnic discourses on the *Han minjok* (Korean nation) that facilitated anticolonial struggles when Korea was colonized by Japan over the period 1910–1945 (Duara, 2006). Korean nationalism emerged as an ideology of anticolonial struggle. This fight against the Japanese empire, in turn, reinforced Korean nationalism based on a shared belief of ethnic homogeneity and a desire for an independent Korean nation-state (Koo, 1993; Shin, 2006). However, national division pushed by the two power blocs of the Cold War thwarted this illusion of ethnic unity and created the incongruities found in the political and ethnic dimensions of Korean nationhood. The legacies of anticolonial nationalism and Cold War ideological confrontation formed two critical pillars in the nation-building project of North Korea.

² Transborder Koreans are regionally concentrated in four countries: China, the United States, Japan, and Russia. Particularly, *Chosŏnjok* in China, *Zainichi* Korean in Japan, and *Koryŏin* in Russia are colonial-era migrants and their descendants. Meanwhile, the main population of ethnic Koreans in the United States are postwar immigrants from South Korea. For North Korea, people in the South are another type of transborder *Tongp'o* (coethnic) that was produced by division.

First, an anti-Japanese armed struggle led by Kim Il-sung became a valuable political resource in North Korea. It allowed Kim to be portrayed as a national liberator and semimythical hero and permitted him to lay claim to the legacy of a pure ethnic Korean nationalism (Shin et al., 1999, p. 478). The establishment of his Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) thus had its origins in anti-imperialist struggles. In time, this developed into anti-Americanism, as the United States emerged as a new imperialist adversary with the outbreak of the Korean War. Generally, the narrative of nationalism is seldom without an enemy, which traditionally involves either a colonial or imperial power (Barker, 2006, p. 105). Likewise, North Korea has constructed its long-lasting antagonism toward the United States as the cornerstone of its state building.

Second, North Korea has maintained its legitimacy by competing with South Korean regimes and by negating South Korea in order to claim sole legitimacy over the entire ethnic Korean nation. The post-1945 division created the problem of who should represent the Korean nation and who has political legitimacy. Both Koreas reconstructed peculiar links between ethnicity and the state, which otherwise would have resulted in a loss of political legitimacy. For example, North Korean citizens are automatically offered citizenship when they step into South Korea. This is not because of the South Korean government's tolerance toward refugees but rather because of the South's negation of the legitimacy of the DPRK regime. Meanwhile, North Korea has branded the South Korean government as a puppet regime, beholden to American imperialists. North and South Korea have also competed to redefine as their nationals the ethnic Korean nation in Japan and northeast China and their descendants (J. Kim, 2009) as well as the populations on either side of the 38th parallel.

The legacies of anticolonialism and the competition over legitimacy based on the belief of homogeneity have entailed interethnic conflicts and the establishment of us-versus-them mind-sets that have now lasted over a half century. This situation sits in stark contrast to the conventional wisdom that ethnic unity produces peaceful coexistence. The drive toward homogenization has also created critical Others, thereby confirming the integrity of the nation through this contrast. The postcolonial nation-building interwoven with the Cold War constituted the national discourse in North Korea, with confrontations between the Korean nation and the enemies of the nation—the United States and conservative groups in South Korea.

However, despite making critical Others, North Korea has emphasized the "blood relations" of the Korean people since the 1970s, effacing the original concept of Stalin's theory of nation with the development of Kim Il-sung's *juče* ideology, which promotes self-reliance in politics, economics, culture, and philosophical outlook (Cumings, 1993).³ Since the late 1990s, North Korea has redefined the concept of *minjok*, expanding the imagined scope of the Korean nation by embracing overseas Koreans (Choi & Lee, 2017). Even today, unification proposals issued by both Koreas are based on the quasi-primordial belief that the *Han minjok* (Korean nation) is a "unitary nation" (*tanil minjok*) and that this premise will inevitably lead to national reunification (*minjok t'ongil*).

³In 1970, the law of the North Korean Worker's Party, which was reformed during its Fifth Congress, prescribed that the Worker's Party would follow *juče* ideology, applying Marxist-Leninist thought in a practical way in the DPRK (I-s. Kim, 1983, pp. 232–256).

Kim Jong-un's regime has used two veins of discourse: *Kim Il-sung minjok*,⁴ an interpellation from the mid-1990s that draws boundaries between the North and the South; and *Chosŏn minjok*,⁵ which emphasizes the homogeneity of the two Koreas. The ethnic nationalism was activated in the 2018 Korean peace process as a potentially unifying force. National discourse in North Korea has cemented the political cleavages of division while emphasizing the ideal of unity with the "brethren" in the South. Historically, this paradoxical national discourse raised the question of how a transborder Korean should be represented, which turned out to be complicated by failures to form a nation-state in the peninsula. The new representation of a Korean nation became necessary as a response to the regime's change in outlook and the drastic political shift, from provocation in 2017 to dialogue in 2018. Before analyzing North Korean media representations of transborder nationhood, I first discuss how Kim Jong-un's regime transformed mediascapes in pursuit of globality and rebuilt the idea of the Korean nation through media.

Toward a Global Imaginary: Contextualizing North Korean Media

Today, media technologies enable people to imagine themselves as being together despite spatial distance, thereby strengthening the idea of nation and belonging. As Anderson (1991) reasoned, print capitalism is an important condition for modern imagined communities: through the spread of the printed word in cheap publications, potentially unlimited numbers of individuals have access to identical information without having direct contact with the originator. The Internet has played a significant role in standardizing and strengthening nationalist sentiment. Television channels, websites, and social networks have become the new forms of print capitalism in our global era.

Communication technologies have made interactions across borders much more viable. These technologies include websites, which are crucial both at the level of identity and as a political tool. For example, the Chilean government has designated a "fourteenth region" in the country to reintegrate Chileans abroad—not by encouraging their return, but by enhancing their sense of Chileanness. The primary tool for creating an imagined community of diasporic Chileans was the government's official website (Eriksen, 2007). The development of the state-sponsored website allowed for the conditions for the continued loyalty and identification of a transborder nation. In the age of deterritorialization, media technologies have made it possible to reterritorialize transborder nations. In North Korea, the regime's efforts to embrace the transborder Korean indicate the intersection of globalizing media and nation-building.

North Korea is known as an extreme case of isolationism and has treated globalization as a new form of colonialism. The North Korean government controls the most powerful sectors of the culture industry, and because of this, the North Korean press and news broadcasts directly reflect the character of the regime and its agenda. Historically, the regime's attempt to tighten mass media was closely connected

⁴ The term *Kim Il-sung minjok* emerged at the time of the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994, and it identified Kim Il-sung as the father of the nation (J-i. Kim, 1998). This rhetoric was developed to overcome the crisis of legitimacy between two Koreas and the crisis over the survival of the global socialist system by emphasizing the superiority of the late leader as well as the North Korean-style socialist system.

⁵ *Chosŏn minjok* (Korean nation) refers to a unitary nation of identical bloodline, language, and culture based on Pyongyang in the Korean peninsula.

to the aim of blocking the inflow of foreign culture as well as to maintain its national socialist culture against the “invasion” of capitalism and the centrifugal “threat” of globalization. The media strategy of the DPRK in the past is encapsulated in the idea of “the mosquito net,”⁶ attributing the collapse of the communist bloc to capitalist powers’ ideological “poisoning.” Yet, with the rule of Kim Jong-un, North Korean media has recently attempted to engender greater global connectedness with the outside world. For instance, North Korean media is actively using social media to distribute the regime’s message and target audiences outside the country.

These changes reflect the regime’s strategy of transforming itself toward the global imaginary in pursuit of the global trend (*segyejŏk ch’use*) and world class (*segyejŏk suchun*).⁷ Even the Kim regime still fights against globalization, regarding it as an “imperialist force” for “world integration” (“Globalization,” 2018). However, the regime has been attempting to facilitate rapid contact across the borders. The production of the media contents in global settings reflects the current situations such as the progression of marketization, the inflow of mass foreign media, and the progress of inter-Korean peace.

Representation of a Transborder Korean Nation in North Korean Media

There are many ways to examine the processes that embrace transborder nationhood in reference to media, including broadcasting, websites, and other social media (Ding, 2007; Eriksen 2007). In the North Korean context, I propose that an official website can serve as a fitting case. I specifically point to the Uriminzokkiri website, which is part of the global connectedness project aimed at embracing the idea of a unified Korean nation—South Korean citizens and Koreans living overseas.⁸ Importantly, the site operates channels on international platforms and actively posts news, pictures, and video clips that specifically target Koreans outside the DPRK. Throughout its short history, Uriminzokkiri has played a significant role in reshaping the representation of the Korean nation in order to meet the Kim regime’s agenda. Recent political shifts, including the series of inter-Korean summits in 2018, led Uriminzokkiri to open up new spaces for the idea of Korean nationalism.

The significant change in North Korean media mentioned above becomes more salient at this particular juncture, which has brought “a swift end to the Cold War relic of longstanding division and confrontation,” and “to boldly open up a new era of national reconciliation, peace, and prosperity” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018a, para. 3). In its emphasis on a unitary nation, ethnonationalism became valuable

⁶ Joint editorial for 1999 states that “we should fix a mosquito net against the ideological and cultural penetration” (“Kongdong sasŏl,” 1999, p. 1).

⁷ For example, a series of construction projects such as cultural and leisure facilities in the Kim Jong-un era were often admired as “world first-class” in the national press.

⁸ The website for Uriminzokkiri can be found at www.uriminzokkiri.com. The site is controlled by the DPRK’s Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland (Choguk P’yŏnghwa Tongil Wiwŏnhoe), which is an organization that promotes Korean reunification. The website posts public statements related to inter-Korean relations and propaganda operations in South Korea and elsewhere abroad (Ministry of Unification, n.d.). Though Uriminzokkiri is currently blocked in South Korea because of the National Security Law, some South Korean audiences connect to the website through alternative routings.

as a unifying force in both the North and the South. In fact, the reunification discourse in both the Panmunjeom Declaration and the September Pyongyang Joint Declaration, signed by leaders of both Koreas, is based on “national reconciliation” (*minjok hwahae*)—the premise that a long history of ethnic unity should inevitably lead to the reunification. In addition, the “independence of the Korean nation” (*minjok chaju*) is mentioned in both declarations as another principle for reunification.

In the recent dramatic improvement of inter-Korean relations, from the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games to the third inter-Korean summit, the journey of the Korean peace process in 2018 has allowed cracks in the so-called “division system” (Paik, 2011) and thus has made an impact on the representation of the Korean nation as well. The making of a transborder nation postulates the existence of an imagined community based on shared culture and beliefs. At this new juncture, a need has arisen for representation that is capable of creating cohesion and loyalty among ethnic Koreans. My interest here lies in how North Korea represented the two veins of the premise toward reunification—the principle of independence and the reconciliation of a Korean nation.

Uriminzokkiri

Uriminzokkiri, a website hosted in China, was launched in 2003, and information posted can be read in Korean, English, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese. The website does not have an English name, but a relatively literal translation is “our people together,” or “our nation together.” The site carries news from official North Korean sources, including *Rodong Sinmun*, the official North Korean newspaper of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea; the Korean Central News Agency; and Korean Central Television. Some of its own programming focuses on the reunification of the Korean peninsula. It also maintains social media accounts, including Twitter, Google Plus, Tumblr, Flickr, Pinterest, Instagram, Youku, and Weibo.⁹

In all, the Uriminzokkiri TV website consists of 11 divisions, three of which are revolutionary leadership (*Hyŏngmyŏng hwaldong sosik*), documentary (*Kirok yŏnghwa*), and important information (*Chungyo podo*), which carries selected news from the official North Korean source. Its own programs and material are uploaded to other sections: news (*Sosik*), camera focus (*K’amera ch’ojŏm*), popular feelings (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*), film editing (*Hwamyŏn p’yŏnjimmul*), newsletter (*Sisa haesŏl*), film and poem (*Hwamyŏnkwa si*), UCC (User Created Contents), and film music (*Hwamyŏn ŭmak*) sections. The division of popular feelings (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*) predominantly covers the voices of overseas Koreans in South Korea, Japan, and China. Here, *kyŏre*, literally meaning the ethnic nation, has been used in kindred image.¹⁰

I compare the media representation on the Korean nation in the postsummit period with the presummit period, setting the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games as a starting point of a peace mood

⁹ Until September 2017, Uriminzokkiri had a YouTube channel with more than 18,000 subscribers as a primary distribution network for its propaganda. However, the channel, which had been on YouTube for about seven years, was shut down for violating YouTube’s community guidelines. After YouTube blocked its channel, Uriminzokkiri TV started to utilize other platforms, such as Youku in China and VKontakte in Russia. Altogether, Uriminzokkiri TV has archived thousands of videos and other footage.

¹⁰ The use of the word *kyŏre* emphasizes affective attachment, while *minjok* emphasizes a political project.

in the Korean peninsula. I analyzed video clips posted on Uriminzokkiri TV from 2017 to 2018 and conducted qualitative document analysis—a research method that aims to rigorously and systematically analyze the contexts of written and new documents such as government reports (Altheide 1996; Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2010). I follow Altheide's (1996) method, which involves organizing information into categories related to the research questions, articulating key areas of analysis, and analyzing the results. Because the *Kyŏreŭi minsim* section in Uriminzokkiri TV produces the contents especially for South Koreans and Koreans abroad, I chose to examine these examples. In this analysis, I refer to 15 video clips that provide examples of the representation of the Korean nation and additional sources from the *Sosik* section¹¹ as well as Panmunjeom and Pyongyang Declarations. In so doing, I highlight how the media representation makes the Korean nation imaginable in the progress of inter-Korean peace.

Video Texts and the Korean Nation

Struggling Against Imperialism

In 2017, Uriminzokkiri TV posted 62 videos on *Kyŏreŭi minsim*, where most of the contents were related to criticism of either the United States or South Korea. One-third of the episodes criticized the United States, particularly expressing strong antagonism toward President Donald Trump, who was mainly portrayed as a madman addicted to war. For example, a video clip uploaded on September 14, 2017, names the United States as the "axis of evil" and proclaims that the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) deployed in South Korea is part of an invasion of the peninsula (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2017c). Interestingly, it also claims Seongju, a county where the THAAD missile defense system was deployed, as "our territory" and states that the missile system is "bitter water that should be extracted out of our land" while portraying images of anti-THAAD protests by villagers. The title of another video uploaded on November 8, 2017, during Trump's visit to South Korea is "Anti-war, Anti-America" (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2017a). Here, Trump is demonized as a warmonger trying to colonize at least the southern part of the Korean peninsula, set against battle scenes. The video asserts that the key strategy for the *minjok* is anti-America by showing South Koreans who protest Trump's visit and using South Korean protest songs (*Minjung kayo*),¹² which express a victory-over-imperialism narrative as the background music. In addition to the slogan "anti-war, peace practice," it uses the phrase "unification land, national land without war, we will make ourselves" (see Figure 1).

¹¹ According to the English version of the Uriminzokkiri website, *Kyŏreŭi minsim* and *Sosik* are translated as "popular feelings" and "news," respectively. The full title of *Kyŏreŭi minsim* is "*Namnyŏkkwa hae-oeŭi moksori Kyŏreŭi minsim*," which means "the voice of the people of the South and abroad, the popular feelings of the nation."

¹² The title of the song is "The Song for Anti-war, Anti-America," which was composed in South Korea in the 1980s.



Figure 1. Anti-war, Anti-America (Kyöreüi minsim, 2017a).

These two anti-American contents use the images of South Korean protests and South Korean colonization in order to construct a “Korean nation” that sits in contrast to the American Other. The South Korean protesters embody two contrasting forces: the Korean nation and the American imperialists. The imagined America in North Korea is the Caucasian Other, who is invariably a hostile and fixed opponent.

While the South Korean demonstrators against America are depicted as patriots, the opposite group is described as national traitors. The other two-thirds of the 2017 videos cover explicitly blame South Korea, especially targeting the conservative party in South Korea and Park Geun-hye, South Korea’s former president. For Kim Jong-un, since all Koreans belong to a single group—despite a fraction of so-called internal traitors, who surrendered the nation to imperialist forces and contaminated the purity of the Korean nation—the majority of grassroots forces (*minjung*) can unite behind the imagined idea of a single Korean nation. For example, some videos show support for the “candlelight revolution” that ousted President Park Geun-hye. Overall, the struggle is depicted as one between patriots and traitors, and between the forces of national liberation and the imperialist forces. Besides criticizing the South Korean “traitors,” other video clips covered the domestic and international situation in South Korea.

In the making of the critical Others, images of past suffering and injustice are often invoked. For instance, the tragic deaths of two teenage schoolgirls, Misun and Hyosun, who were hit by a U.S. military vehicle in 2002, and which inflamed anti-American sentiments (*panmi*) in South Korea, are introduced in one video with the aim of demanding the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea (Kyöreüi minsim, 2017b). Another video clip, commemorating a missile test on August 29, emphasizes the fact that North

Korea fired a ballistic missile across Japan on the historical date of the Japanese annexation of Korea, remarking that, this day is to be reestablished as a national occasion (*minjokŭi kyŏngsa*) by threatening Japan through citing South Koreans' comments. The upload of this episode was strategically set at a time just after the Japanese annexation day—widely understood as a day of disgrace in Korean history. The temporal shift from a moment in history to the present time stresses the missile test's historical link to the past and its contemporary relevance (see Figure 2).

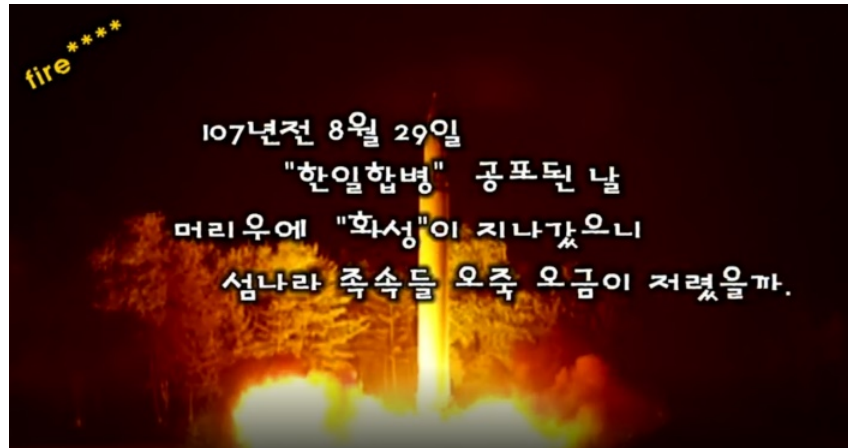


Figure 2. Value of nation, Hwasŏng (Kyŏreŭi minsim, 2017d).

I also find North Korean ideologists selecting and reinterpreting historical material to bolster the legitimation of the regime, which has suffered from colonial invasions. Using historical traumas as a resonating chord, they portray that the pain of colonialism and war is necessarily their pain also by dint of their shared “Koreanness.” Accordingly, all the North’s practices, including its missile tests, which are intended to threaten imperialist powers, can be framed and justified as legitimate revenge with the overarching aim to protect the independence of the Korean nation (*minjok chaju*). The Kim regime’s imaginings of Korean nation are based on a contrast between a unified Korean nation and the enemy (or traitors). This stark contrast was highlighted further during the heightened tension between North Korea and the United States throughout 2017. As a result, the incongruity of the political and ethnic dimensions is seen as a key factor behind the tension on the Korean peninsula. The imagination of Korean nation operates in the continuation of their tradition of anticolonial struggle, cementing the clear boundary between the independent *minjok* in the North and the semicolonial *minjok* in the South, and between the legitimate successors and the illegitimate traitors.

Representation of the Korean Peace Process

The escalation of tensions between North Korea and the United States in 2017 dramatically changed; at the turn of the new year, there was a mood for peace. In 2018, three inter-Korean summits took place in the space of fewer than six months, as well as a historic first summit meeting between the leaders of North Korea and the United States, held in Singapore in June 2018. The North’s and South’s move

toward peace in 2018 was initiated during the Pyeongchang Olympic Games.¹³ Since the DPRK agreed to participate in the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, *Kyŏreŭi minsim* changed its tune toward peace and reunification and began celebrating the series of summits as core elements of Kim Jong-un's achievements. Since this change of outlook, only one video was uploaded concerning the United States; it condemns Vice President Mike Pence with the comment stating that "during the peace festival, Pence visited the *Chŏnan* vessel with North Korean defectors" (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2018e). In addition, although it continues to maintain its negative stance toward the United States as well as conservative forces in the South, the frequency of references to both has been relatively lower compared with the previous year.

The first video of *Kyŏreŭi minsim* posted on January 14, proclaims "Let's make 2018 as the year of national reconciliation and unity." It also refers to spring being in the air, a bright future for the South and the North, and the idea of reunification, including cooperation, talks, and *minjok kongyŏng* (coprosperity; *Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2018f). These welcome sentiments are provided through the comments of South Koreans.¹⁴ Another video, posted on March 10, right after Kim Jong-un's meeting with a South Korean envoy on March 5, uses a combination of images of the delegations meeting and cherry blossoms, symbolizing that the relations between the two Koreas had warmed the prior month's Olympic Games. Both videos feature an inter-Korean cheering team with Korea Unification flags in the background.

In the aftermath of the first inter-Korean summit in April 2018, about which *Kyŏreŭi minsim* declared that "South and North Korea will reconnect the blood relations of the people at Panmunjeom," *Kyŏreŭi minsim* posted a series of episodes titled "Panmunjeom shock seen from the comments" (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2018g, 2018h). The episodes reflect welcoming responses from South Koreans regarding the inter-Korean summit in Panmunjeom, with Internet comments stating, "Panmunjeom, from symbol of division for 70 years to symbol of peace." The video also depicts the welcome dinner as a national feast, where "it was difficult to tell who is from the North and who is from the South," demonstrating that the Korean nation is racially homogeneous. In the reconstruction of Korean nation, North Korean media is appealing to a sense of primordial bonds that derive from the assumed givens of social existence, which provide the congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on (Geertz, 1963).

Interestingly, another way to get the reconciliation of the Korean nation message across was by using food metaphors. For example, Pyongyang *naengmyŏn* is shown with the subtitle "Pyongyang *naengmyŏn*, the most searched for word [in South Korea], national pride, world's best food, and now the symbol of peace!" The video uses the image of a South Korean-style cocktail mixed with Pyongyang's Taedonggang beer and Jeju's Hallasan soju to show the expectation for national unity (see Figure 3). Here, Taedonggang beer and Hallasan soju symbolize the North and the South respectively, thus mixed cocktail was used as unifying symbols. Symbols are selected and deployed, which resonate within aspects of contemporary culture to invent nationhood (Brown, 2000).

¹³ Additionally, prior to the games, in Kim Jong-un's 2018 New Year's Day address, the North Korean leader discussed conditional talks with South Korea and mentioned the potential offer of sending a delegation to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics (J-u Kim, 2018, p. 1).

¹⁴ The source of these quotations collected by Uriminzokkiri TV was not disclosed.

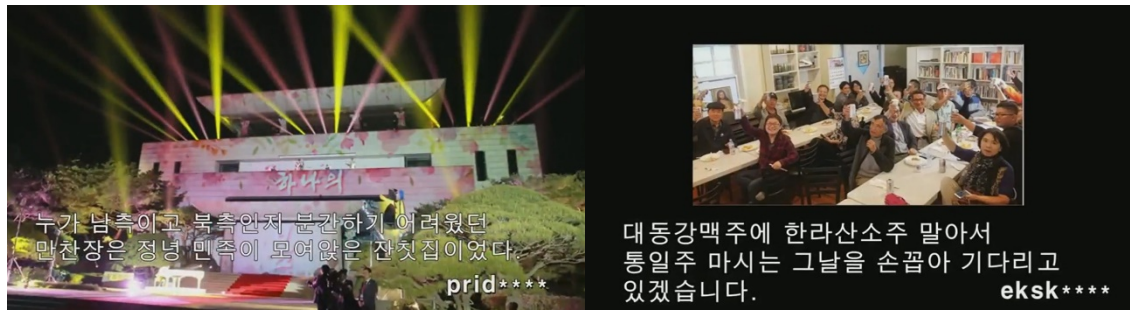


Figure 3. Panmunjeom shock seen from the comments (2; Kyöreüi minsim, 2018h).

After the first North Korea–U.S. summit in June 2018, the third inter-Korean summit took place in Pyongyang in September of the same year. This inter-Korean summit further reaffirmed the principle of independence and the reconciliation of the Korean nation. Again, *Kyöreüi minsim* posted an optimistic picture of the Korean peninsula on September 24. It also uploaded a same clip with English subtitles on October 12 featuring the Korean two leaders and a blueprint of the Pyongyang–Busan train, along with the South Korean protest song.¹⁵ The lyrics run:

Let's unify hand in hand. Let's unify hand in hand. / (Verse one) Right, we wish our unification more than anybody else in the world. Let's not mind other countries. It is our unification to achieve. / (Verse two) Right, there is no reason to fight against each other. We are all one blood. Let's lay down guns and swords aimed at each other. Let's open heart and hug each other.

The clip ends with images of symbolic Mountain Baekdu, behind a photo of the two leaders holding hands and posing with their wives, with the lake in the background (see Figure 4).

¹⁵ This song was composed in 2000 to celebrate the 6.15 Joint Declaration in South Korea.



Figure 4. Korean peninsula free from war, the story just imagined in a dream (Kyöreüi minsim, 2018a).

This episode suggests that it is time to remove the wire fence that divides the *Han minjok* (Korean nation), as “through policy measures, the aspiration and hope of all Koreans that the current developments in inter-Korean relations will lead to reunification” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018b, para. 3). In the clip, the image and the sound of the train imply the inter-Korean railway connection project can overcome the division and bring a new future to the Korean peninsula. It also engages in the ethnogenesis of the Korean nation by inviting the two leaders to be part of the alliance. On the one hand, Mountain Baekdu is understood as the background of both Korea’s mythohistorical derivation from a common ancestor called Tan’gun.¹⁶ On the other hand, the mountain is a centerpiece of the North’s idolization and propaganda campaign to highlight the sacred revolution and bloodline of the ruling Kim family.¹⁷

¹⁶ Tan’gun is the mythical, divinely descended founder of the ethnic Korean people.

¹⁷ In North Korea, Mountain Baekdu is represented as an important historical site in Korea’s arduous, 20-year guerrilla war against the occupying Japanese in the 1930s and 1940s. In this long struggle, Kim Il-sung is depicted as a great leader who played a leading role. North Korea asserts that Kim Jong-il was born at Mountain Baekdu.

It is common in Korean nationalist discourse to represent the myth of a singular ancestry and genealogy from the distant past to the present (Lie, 2004). By using cultural symbols like Mountain Baekdu to indicate both shared ancestry and revolutionary work, nationalist ideologists of the regime are engaging Korean in primordial way, essentially treating myths as historical facts or as having foundations in facts, while also downplaying differences between personal experiences and group history (Kapferer, 1988). The selection of symbols used in the nation's representation of itself is highly politically motivated: The use of standard ethnic symbols in nationalism is intended to stimulate reflection on one's own cultural distinctiveness, thereby creating a feeling of nationhood. In this way, the interpenetration of myth and state power suggests that Korean's primary identity connects transborder nation to their ancestral land, even if they may have lived their entire lives elsewhere.

Indeed, the embrace of overseas Koreans activates a shared sense of ethnic unity and enhances the imagined scope of the Korean nation beyond the territorial boundary. Uriminzokkiri TV produced several videos that air articles written by overseas Koreans living in China, Japan, the United States, and Russia in the *Sosik* (news) of the website. All these episodes are titled "An essay written by coethnics" (*tongp'oka ssŭngŭl*)¹⁸ and cover the voices of various transborder Koreans. Its regular reports include the welcoming opinion of the inter-Korean and DPRK-U.S. summits as well as the joint North Korea-China summits and contain themes that call for peace on the Korean peninsula, independence, and reunification of the Korean nation. After Kim Jong-un visited China in early May 2018, the *Sosik* section introduced articles written by overseas Koreans living in China, stressing friendly relations between the DPRK and China and describing the relationship as "rooted in blood ties" and "brotherhood." Similarly, an essay written by a Korean American uploaded on June 25, 2018, celebrates a new establishment of North Korea-U.S. relations (see Figures 5 and 6).

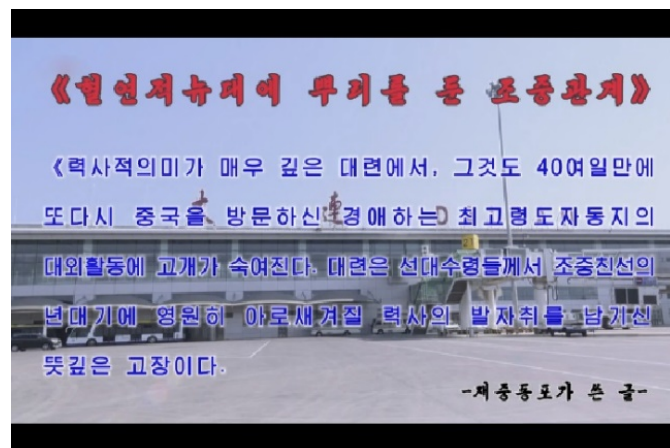


Figure 5. DPRK-China relations rooted in blood ties (*Sosik*, 2018a).

¹⁸ *Tongp'o* literally means "sibling." *Tong* in *tongp'o* emphasizes common origin.

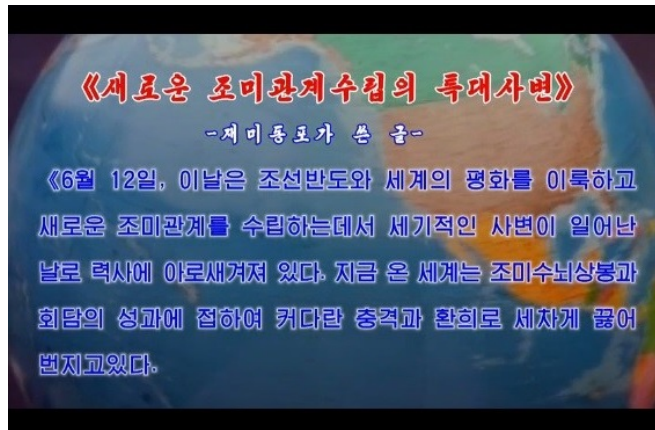


Figure 6. Special incident for establishing new DPRK-U.S. relations (Sosik, 2018b).

These videos also offer a view that overseas Koreans belong to the same culture and have shared political interests. The diasporic imagination of Korean nationhood means that Koreans should care about Korea not only while on the peninsula but also while abroad. The key to such transborder nation-building is to maintain loyalty to the nation, even when residing in another country. For example, North Korea is often referred to as the motherland when discussing the idea of unification. In this way, transborder Koreans become connected to the “legitimate” homeland—North Korea—no matter where they currently live or where they were born. North Korean media embraces not only a divided nation—South Korean people—but also colonial-era migrants and their descendants, including Korean Chinese and Korean Japanese as well as ethnic Koreans in the United States. In this sense, nation-building in North Korea is a controlling mechanism that attempts to activate a sense of belonging to the transborder Korean nation.

Celebrating Kim Jong-un’s Achievements

North Korean media also constructs nationalism by celebrating Kim Jong-un’s achievements in the Korean peace process. *Kyŏreŭi minsim*, which covers the voices of peace mentioned above, presents not only a unified Korean nation but also Kim Jong-un as a national hero. For example, the first video in 2018 places the North’s esteemed leader as a peacemaker, stating, “80 million people! Let’s be proud of hero to which our nation gave birth,” and “Kim Jong-un is a guardian for peace of the peninsula.” Further, on both May 7 and 9, *Kyŏreŭi minsim* praises Kim’s brave, open, confident, and humorous character. Additionally, the video uploaded right after the DPRK-U.S. summit depicts Kim Jong-un as a great negotiator who saved the Korean peninsula from crises (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2018b). In a similar vein, the video posted on June 23 stresses that the first summit with the United States was the result of Kim Jong-un’s initiative, referring to the event as a “centurial meeting prepared by Kim Jong-un’s firm decision and will”; this clip was posted with a Japanese caption as well (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. The hero of world peace (Kyöreüi minsim, 2018c).

Taken together, the captions imply that the protagonist of the Korean peace process is Kim Jong-un, and they attribute all the success to their great leader. The celebration of Kim is associated with the regime's deep anxiety toward the construction of a powerful socialist state while diluting the image of a brutal regime. Through this process of representing the "glorious events," Koreans living outside the DPRK are able to link patriotism many feel toward their homeland directly to North Korea. The association of peace with the great achievements of the regime further glorifies Korea. To some extent, these representations of Kim Jong-un also imply North Korea's response to the perceived threat to its national sovereignty when encountering a foreign power. Although North Korea's important step onto the international stage means, in some respects, a weakening of the state, the official discourse continues to celebrate the series of summits, focusing on national unity and world peace through its power of independence rather than addressing cooperation with past enemies over decades.

The videos suggest a bright future for North Korea and for the Korean peninsula. Borrowing the words of overseas Koreans, the clips mix together all the significant events worth celebrating. They make a connection between the powerful socialist state and ethnic Koreans abroad, as if what is significant for North Korea is significant for all Koreans. Further, as discussed, *Kyöreüi minsim* produces the clips with foreign subtitles, including Japanese, Chinese, and English, despite the emphasis on Koreans' common culture and, in particular, common language. Embracing a population who has never been to North Korea is associated with global connectedness, which also partly reflects the regime's recognition of the heterogeneity of national culture through the new forms of diversity of the Korean nation.

The United States: No Longer an Enemy?

The earlier regular criticism of the United States and South Korea by North Korean media has decreased recently, and its level of denouncement has weakened considerably with the advent of the country's peaceful mood in 2018. However, members of the Liberty Korea Party are still seen as "internal traitors," and both Japan and the United States continue to be viewed as imperialist powers. A clip posted in March 2018 shows video footage of massacres of Korean "comfort women" by the Japanese military during World War II (*Kyöreüi minsim*, 2018d). And in both March and October of 2018, *Kyöreüi minsim* continued to criticize the United States, particularly Trump's October rejection of the idea of South Korea

easing sanctions on North Korea (*Kyŏreŭi minsim*, 2018i). Thus, the North Korean state's view does not necessitate the removal of all criticism of outside forces at work—meaning all those who fall in the category of the enemies—but rather continues its fight against what it perceives as imperialist forces. Moreover, North Korea's stance is seen as relatively heroic in its representation, because the North regards South Korea as a victim at the hands of foreign powers. Thus, the last two videos reinforce the importance of patriotism and heroics by openly identifying and criticizing the North's enemies.

Conclusion

North Korea has reconstructed the transborder nation as a national project, forming ties between the "homeland" state and its transborder "kin" through media. Analyses of *Kyŏreŭi minsim* in Uriminzokkiri TV demonstrate the significant shift from antagonism in the presummit period to reconciliation in the postsummit period. The media representation illustrates not only the peace mood from the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games but also the juxtapositions of the ethnic and political dimensions and of patriotism and nationalism. On the one hand, the representation of *Kyŏreŭi minsim* emphasizes ethnic oneness and national reconciliation. On the other hand, it protects the legitimation of the regime and national independence from the imperialist power, celebrating the leader's achievements and essentializing loyalty to the "great socialist state."

In the ethnic dimension, the kindred aspects of nation were emphasized, implying the responsibility of family obligations as members of a large family (Eriksen, 2008). Interestingly, the Korean nation was imagined in primordial ways and portrayed as a community of suffering and coresponsibility in association with historical traumas and future destiny. In this process, the new space for potential unification of two Koreas invited not only those in the North and the South but also Koreans abroad. Identifying transborder nation, ethnic nationalism is intended to reproduce a shared sense of ethnic unity, functioning as a unifying force aimed at "lasting peace."

In the political dimension, the media representation reflects the regime's anxieties toward a powerful socialist state. The celebration of North Korea's diplomatic reach to the world and the leader's achievements reproduce the vision of the country. When it expresses hope for worldwide peace, the dream is to be accomplished through the work of the North Korean regime without losing its initiative. By borrowing the voices of Koreans living in Japan, the United States, and South Korea, Koreanness is achieved through the quality of *hwahae* (reconciliation), without having to include images of colonizing forces and without losing its *chaju* (independence). That is, when North Korean media conveys the ethnocultural messages to the Korean nation existing outside North Korea, it is still rooted in the glorious socialist homeland.

This hybrid form of the coexistence of two loyalties—nationalism and patriotism—represents the ambivalent status as a state and as a nation as well as the complexity of the current dynamics surrounding the Korean peninsula that North Korea is facing. To some extent, the advent of the peace process in 2018 blurred the incongruities found in the political and ethnic dimensions of Korean nationhood that were produced by ethnic and territorial division. Thus, most saliently, the making of transborder belonging interwoven with globalizing media reflects the media as a critical site in North Korea's nation-building.

Both Koreas have projected nationalist discourses and practices in the construction of transborder nationalism. South Korea has shaped the transborder ties by bureaucratic practices selectively (J. Kim, 2016). The recent South Korean efforts to reach Koreans abroad via government, business interests, and popular culture are visible (Lie, 2017). Though renewed reckoning of Koreanness occurred in tandem with the Korean peace process, transborder Koreans are still embedded in the division system. The remaking of a transborder Korean nation involves dynamic and complex process between two Koreas and agents in various regions, which requires specific examination.

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