

National Identity and Attitudes Toward North Korean Defectors

Jiyoon Kim

South Korea has traditionally valued ethnic homogeneity. While that mentality remains, the emergence of a demographic shift is challenging the way South Koreans view national identity, or “Koreanness.” The immigration influx in South Korea is reported to have surpassed 3.1 percent of the total population in 2013 and has been increasing for the past ten years.¹

As a new demographic composition emerges, we can cautiously predict that this phenomenon will have an influence on public understanding of Koreanness. For example, this new attitude toward national identity can be expected to influence perspectives on immigrants living in South Korea, fostering tolerance toward the presence of other ethnic groups and their acceptance as Koreans. Of course, the increased number of foreign workers and immigrants may induce more antagonistic feelings against them. A transformation in national identity appears unavoidable. On the one hand, the Korean people may cultivate a more ethnically oriented national identity in resistance to “outsiders.” On the other, “civic” national identity may overshadow the ethnic element. The change in national identity is anticipated to be followed by other important consequences, one of which is how people view unification with North Korea, which is closely associated with strong ethnic identity. Will the strengthened multiethnic character of society increase civic identity? Will the shift in national identity make people less supportive of unification? These are the guiding questions in this chapter.

This chapter investigates attitudes of South Koreans toward North Korean defectors in light of the recent changes of national identity taking place within South Korea. North Korean defectors are of interest because they can provide a proxy view of South Koreans toward North Korea. In particular, as they are the people who have fled from a country with which South Koreans share a history and ethnic bond, and ultimately with whom they expect to unify, how they are seen and treated attests to a broader set of views related to reunification.

North Korean defectors become South Korean citizens as soon as they register themselves at the resident center. From that point on, they receive the same status, responsibilities, and privileges as any ordinary South Korean. However, living in a completely different system is never an easy task, which makes them similar to other immigrants. Conflicts between North Korean defectors and South Koreans occur persistently and are likely to become an important social issue in the foreseeable future, much more so if unification should take place.

By focusing on changing views on national identity, I delve into the factors that influence the South Korean public’s attitude toward North Korean defectors. I first examine national identity shared by South Koreans in an increasingly multiethnic society. Then I analyze how North Korean defectors are perceived by South Koreans, in the context of their national identity. These analyses are deepened through the use of survey data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the implications of the results for a unified Korea.

THE KOREAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

The subject of South Koreans’ sense of national identity with regard to North Korean defectors is essentially a question of whether South Koreans see them as “us” or “them.” National identity is a loosely defined term, but according to Wiggins, et.al, it is a person’s belief or emotion toward a country or a nation to which she or he belongs.² Numerous studies have been conducted based on Anthony Smith’s division of national identity into two components:

“civic identity” and “ethnic identity.”³ On the one hand, all citizens enjoy the same rights and responsibilities under the law, and civic culture is defined by education and socialization. On the other hand, the same ancestry, pre-historic myths, and memories play an indispensable role in forming the ethnic component of national identity. The civic and ethnic components are not mutually exclusive but often exist together. The overshadowing of one component can occur, but the two components are likely to coexist in many cases. Jones and Smith’s analysis of surveys demonstrates that nationalism in many countries is comprised of both.

South Korean identity can also be viewed in terms of these two components. The myth of *Dangun* epitomizes the ethnic identity shared by the Korean people, both North and South. The public is likely to believe that Koreans are descendants of *Dangun* and have belonged to a single race since the pre-historic period. As Shin notes, the strongest rationale for unification of the two Koreas comes from this ethnic identity, which has been a part of continuous efforts to unify and restore unity on the Korean Peninsula.⁴

In contrast, constructivists argue that the Korean nation is a new concept created by nationalists in the late nineteenth century. For instance, Andre Schmid asserts that Korean ethnic nationalism stems from the efforts to separate Korea from China and to fit Korea into the modern international system.⁵ For these scholars, although Korea has maintained exceptional territorial integrity for a long period, the country has not met the conditions for primordial ethnic nationalism. For instance, civilizational identity stemming from Chinese Confucianism overpowered society, and Korean elites conformed to Chinese civilization rather than forming a cultural and ethnic nation limited to residents of the Chosun dynasty.

If so, why is there such a strong emphasis on ethnic unity and a shared bloodline in Korea? Behind this phenomenon lies Japanese racial discrimination in the 1900s. Shin asserts that Korean nationalism became ethnic in the late 1920s to resist the brutal Japanese colonial rule. Even after Korean independence, however, ethnic nationalism did not fade. On the contrary, it became stronger. The division of Korea propelled competition between the South and the North for the prize of one legitimate ethnic Korea. Shin also accurately notes that “race, ethnicity, and nation were conflated” in Korean nationalism, evidenced in the frequent usage of the term *minjok*, sometimes implying “ethnicity,” and, at other times, implying “nation.”⁶ Unification became a *raison d’être* for both Koreas, and ethnic nationalism has been the driving force, which explains the South’s continued economic assistance to the North since the late 1990s, despite it still being at war against the North.⁷

Recently, there has been growing concern that Korean ethnic nationalism will be transformed into South Korean nationalism. Kang Won-Taek and Lee Nae-Young’s edited volume, *Understanding Korean Identity: Through the Lens of Opinion Surveys*, first took a serious look at such a transformation. Kang admits that Korean nationalism has been maintained by an ethnic myth for a long period; however, he predicts that ethnic-oriented Korean nationalism will soon be challenged because of changing demography and changing national identity as a consequence. He expresses concern that Korean nationalism will soon be replaced by “South Korean nationalism,” which may displace the rationale for unification with North Korea.⁸

Kang and Lee use the East Asia Institute’s surveys in 2005 and 2010 to examine national identity among South Koreans. Following Anthony Smith’s criteria, they use seven questions

to determine one's degree of civic and ethnic identity.⁹ I used results from the 2013 Asan Daily Poll in which the same questions used by Kang and Lee were asked to the South Korean public. Of the seven criteria, three measure the strength of a respondent's ethnic identity regarding North Korean defectors. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements. A Korean is someone who: (1) is born in Korea, (2) has the Korean bloodline, and (3) lives in Korea for most of one's life. The remaining four measure the strength of one's civic identity. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the following statements. A Korean is someone who: (4) possesses Korean nationality, (5) is able to speak and write the Korean language, (6) abides by the Korean political and legal system, and (7) understands the Korean traditions.¹⁰

Table 1 presents Asan's 2013 results compared with Kang and Lee's 2005 and 2010 studies. In 2013, "abiding by the Korean political and legal system" was identified as the most important measuring stick for being Korean. Surprisingly, the least important factor was "having the Korean bloodline," which has been widely considered to be the indispensable component of ethnic nationalism (See Table 1).

Notable declines were detected in the number of those who agreed that "a person should be born in Korea" and "have the Korean bloodline" to be considered Korean. In 2005 and 2010, 81.9 percent and 87.7 percent of respondents, respectively, agreed that being born in Korea was important. However, 2013 saw a huge decline with only 69.0 percent agreeing with the statement. In contrast, the number of those who think that birth in Korea is *not* important more than doubled to 27.9 percent. A similar tendency can be seen with regard to the statement that Koreans should have a Korean bloodline. The numbers were nearly 80 percent in both 2005 and 2010 while dropping to 65.8 percent in 2013. As many as 30.4 percent of respondents thought that sharing the same bloodline is not important for one to be considered a Korean. The percentage of respondents who consider "living in Korea for most of one's life" important was also relatively low (66.1 percent).

Questions that measure civic identity showed similar, if not greater, importance than before. Approximately 88 percent of respondents answered that keeping Korean nationality was important, which is only a 1 percent drop from the 2010 result. The ability to use the Korean language remained important as well, with 91.7 percent of respondents in agreement. Two elements of civic identity became more important as a measurement of Koreanness. In 2005, 77.5 percent agreed that respecting the Korean political and legal system was essential. In 2013, that number rose to 93.4 percent, the highest percentage among all the survey questions. Conversely, those who think that this is not important for measuring Koreanness dropped to 4.2 percent, compared to 20.6 percent in 2005. The survey also shows that the public views understanding Korean traditions as a significant measurement for being Korean. While 80.9 percent of respondents considered it to be so in 2005, the number rose to 91.5 percent in 2013.

Table 1. Preconditions for Koreanness			
	Year	Important	Not important
ETHNIC COMPONENT			
Being born in Korea	2005	81.9	17.7
	2010	87.7	12.2
	2013	69.0	27.9
Having the Korean bloodline	2005	80.9	18.3
	2010	84.1	15.4
	2013	65.8	30.4
Living in Korea for most of one's life	2005	64.6	34.7
	2010	78.2	21.5
	2013	66.1	30.2
CIVIC COMPONENT			
Maintaining Korean nationality	2005	88.2	11.1
	2010	89.4	10.5
	2013	88.4	9.1
Being able to speak and write in Korean	2005	87.0	12.6
	2010	87.8	12.2
	2013	91.7	6.7
Abiding by the Korean political and legal system	2005	77.5	20.6
	2010	87.3	12.4
	2013	93.4	4.2
Understanding Korean traditions	2005	80.9	18.3
	2010	85.9	14
	2013	91.5	6.1

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

The changes observed in the 2013 study are dramatic and, more importantly, it appears that they have been, by and large, driven by the young generation. As Table 2 indicates, ethnic identity is less important to the Korean youth than it is to the old generation. The phenomenon is particularly visible in questions that ask whether Koreans need to be born in Korea and have the Korean bloodline. Only 56.5 percent of those in their twenties thought that one should be born in Korea to be considered a Korean. Also, 56.9 percent of them thought that having the Korean bloodline is important for a Korean. The numbers differ for older Koreans. 88.1 percent of whom in their sixties and over thought that a Korean should be born in Korea.

Table 2. Preconditions for Koreanness: by Age Groups

		20s	30s	40s	50s	60s or over
ETHNIC COMPONENT						
Being born in Korea	Important	56.5	64.3	68.5	80.3	88.1
	Not Important	43.5	35.7	31.5	19.7	11.9
Having the Korean bloodline	Important	56.9	63.8	59.3	75.0	87.2
	Not Important	43.1	36.2	40.7	25.0	12.8
Living in Korea for most of one's life	Important	61.0	61.4	67.8	75.1	78.5
	Not Important	39.0	38.6	32.2	24.9	21.5
CIVIC COMPONENT						
Maintaining Korean nationality	Important	90.1	86.8	89.4	93.3	96.6
	Not Important	9.9	13.2	10.6	6.7	3.5
Being able to speak and write in Korean	Important	92.0	93.8	90.9	94.2	95.5
	Not Important	8.0	6.2	9.1	5.8	4.5
Abiding by the Korean political and legal system	Important	94.5	94.4	97.1	95.8	96.9
	Not Important	5.5	5.6	2.9	4.2	3.1
Understanding Korean traditions	Important	91.2	95.1	89.8	95.9	98.5
	Not Important	8.8	4.9	10.2	4.1	1.5

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

From Table 2, it is apparent that South Koreans' national identity is undergoing a significant change. Once heavily centered on ethnic identity, it is now moving toward civic identity. This finding appears closely related to the responses to survey questions on unification. From numerous surveys, it is frequently reported that fewer South Koreans want immediate unification with North Korea. The number of young people who do not seek unification at all is increasing as well. For instance, the recent survey of the Asan Institute's Daily Poll suggests that only 17 percent of the Korean public agree that unification should be done as soon as possible. It is only 10 percent of those who are in their twenties who think that unification needs to be done as soon as possible. On the contrary, 21.9 percent of them want the two Koreas to stay the same as separated without unification.¹¹

In addition, the perspective on North Korea does not give sufficient reason for unification founded in ethnic nationalism. According to the numbers in Table 3, only 21.8 percent of South Koreans see North Korea as "one of us." A plurality of South Koreans considers North Korea as a neighbor (32 percent), and 22.4 percent of them indeed consider North Korea as an enemy. The young generation tends to feel distanced from North Korea more than the elderly do. Only 14.1 percent of respondents in their twenties answer North Korea is "one of us." On the other hand, a plurality of the young generation sees North Korea as an enemy

(27.6 percent), and this is as high as those of the older generations. Ethnic identity, which has played a role of uniting North Korea and South Korea as one Korea, is apparently weakening and fewer people perceive North Korea as “one of us.” The distance between North Korea and South Korea is extended, and it is much more serious among youth. The next question is, does it influence those who are originally from North Korea and living in South Korea as a citizen of the latter?

Table 3. Views on North Korea by the South Korean Public

	One of us	Neighbor	Stranger	Enemy	No interest
TOTAL	21.8	32.0	8.9	22.4	10.0
20s	14.1	26.6	15.3	27.6	14.0
30s	21.5	42.5	10.1	13.5	10.4
40s	27.3	33.1	8.6	15.7	9.6
50s	25.9	31.1	5.1	28.1	6.8
60s or over	19.3	25.8	5.6	28.8	9.4

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Mar. 29-Mar. 31, 2014)

GOING ETHNIC OR CIVIC?

The common misperception regarding North Koreans defectors is that their defections are driven solely by political reasons. However, according to Jang Joon-oh and his colleague Go Sung-Ho’s survey in 2010, about 54 percent of North Korean defectors came to the South at the risk of their own lives for economic reasons.¹² Political defection accounted for only 19.2 percent (see Table 4). From this result, the defectors are not particularly different from other immigrant groups.

Table 4. Motivations of North Korean Defectors to Escape

Reasons	%
Poverty	54
Family problem (domestic violence)	2
Political reason	14
Followed one's family	16
Other	14

Source: Jang, Joon-oh and Sung-Ho Go. Survey result used in *North Korean Defectors: Crime & Countermeasures, 2010*

Many believe that South Korea welcomes North Korean defectors with open arms, taking satisfaction that the oppressive North Korean regime is the reason for the escape, and feeling, above all, that the defectors share the same Koreanness ethnically, which is the reason for tendering citizenship as soon as they arrive in South Korea. Nonetheless, that underlying principle that “we” share the same ethnic origin and unconditionally accept the newcomers appears to be under transformation. According to the East Asia Institute’s survey on Koreans’ identity in 2005 and 2010, South Koreans were demonstrating a changed attitude toward the acceptance of North Korean defectors into their society. As displayed in Table 5, there is rather a significant change in people’s opinion on this. In 2005, a plurality of South Koreans (46.2 percent) answered that South Korea should admit all North Korean defectors, since they are Koreans after all. In 2010, the percentage of people who think that way decreased to 38.1 percent. Instead, almost a majority of South Koreans thought that defectors should be selectively admitted to Korea, conditioned on the economic and diplomatic situation (49.9 percent), an increase of 11.1 percent compared with the result in 2005.

Table 5. Acceptance of North Korean Defectors

	2005	2010
Should not admit them for political/economic burden	8.0	9.0
Conditional on economic/diplomatic situation	38.8	49.9
Should admit all of them b/c they are Koreans	46.2	38.1

Source: EAI Survey, Sohn & Lee (2012)

The volume of previous studies on South Koreans’ attitude toward North Korean defectors is meager, and scholarship has primarily focused on the policy arena. However, more studies have shown concern with South Koreans views of North Korean defectors as the number of defectors has increased dramatically. According to the Ministry of Unification statistics, the number of defectors continued to increase until 2011, when 2,706 residents of North Korea arrived in South Korea. The number decreased to 1,516 in 2013. Altogether, 26,124 defectors had settled down in South Korea by the end of that year.

What is driving the change in opinion by South Koreans regarding North Korean defectors? The preliminary studies that examine individual attitudes toward North Korean defectors in South Korea can be classified into three dimensions.¹³ Earlier studies conducted by Kim, Jeong, and Yang focus on psychological aspects of South Koreans, which influence their attitude toward North Korean defectors at an individual level. For instance, Kim and Jeong test contact theory relating to opinions of North Korean defectors. Depending on the experience of contacting or being exposed to defectors, they find that people have different attitudes toward them. Without contact people tend to have sentiments of both sympathy and wariness. In addition, overall feeling toward North Korea and the North Korean people turned out to be influential in determining one’s attitude toward the defectors. Those who feel alienated from North Korea in general are estranged toward North Korean defectors as well.

Some studies also find that socio-demographic factors have influence on how one thinks about the defectors. For instance, the level of education and age are positively associated with the attitude toward North Korean defectors.¹⁴

Another stream of research relates North Korean defectors to tolerance of immigrants. They pay attention to the fact that defectors are from a country with a completely different political and economic system, as well as cultural environment. In this regard, they are treated in a manner similar to foreign immigrants. Sohn and Lee analyze South Koreans' attitude toward North Korean defectors from this perspective. They find how much a person is tolerant or generous on immigrant issues is a significant determinant. They use one's opinion on multicultural Korea and on protection of immigrants' rights to measure the person's level of tolerance on North Korean defectors. They found a somewhat contradictory outcome: one's opinion of multicultural Korea is adversely related to the attitude toward North Korean defectors, but protecting immigrants' rights is positively associated with this attitude.¹⁵ The result begs for clarification, but at least gives an idea of changing attitudes toward North Korean defectors.

In a similar vein, one of the many determinants of one's tolerance of outsiders is national economic outlook. This is due to the perception that immigrants can be a threat in the job market. The level of threat posed by immigrants can be expected to be greater and the attitude toward them aggravated when the economy is not performing well. Thus, one's perception of the national economy is considered to be a significant factor in deciding whether or not one welcomes outsiders.¹⁶ Considering that those most vulnerable in a depressed economy are less educated and in the low-income group, the level of education and of income can be factors that measure one's tolerance of outsiders. Kwon tests these hypotheses for North Korean defectors, finding a limited impact of subjective perceptions of the national economy on South Koreans' attitude toward North Korean defectors. She explains that the limited impact comes from the still small fraction of North Korean defectors in the labor market of South Korea. Also, she asserts that the fact that North Korean defectors generally work as unskilled laborers means that they do not pose much threat to South Koreans.¹⁷

Adding to earlier works, I examine the sense of national identity of South Koreans and its impact on their attitude toward North Korean defectors. There has been a strong sense of ethnic identity assumed when it comes to North Korean defectors. The foremost element that distinguishes these defectors from other immigrant groups is the fact that they are from North Korea, the country South Koreans have believed will become unified with them for more than sixty years. Sohn and Lee use this framework and demonstrate how national identity plays out in one's attitude toward North Korean defectors. They find a mixed result: civic identity and ethnic pride are positively related to one's view of North Korean defectors, while national pride is negatively related.¹⁸ While the study is groundbreaking, the data they used was collected in 2010, which turned out to have quite different responses on national identity from the data in 2013.

I examine this in association with the changed national identity of South Koreans, using the Daily Poll conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies between November 29 and December 1, 2013. The Asan Daily Poll used in this chapter had a sample size of 1,000.

I first measure a respondent's attitude toward North Korean defectors and other immigrants from the United States, Japan, and China. The respondents were asked how they view each migrant group and their answers were originally coded on a four-step scale, 1="very negative" and 4="very positive." I recoded the responses to normalize the scale ("very negative"=0; "very positive"=1). In order to measure favorability, we asked questions about perceptions of immigrants from various countries and North Korea defectors.¹⁹ The average favorability of North Korean defectors was .59, which was the highest, followed by immigrants from the United States (Table 6). This is a notable result considering the usual country favorability ratings, which, according to the Asan Institute's Daily Poll in December 2013, showed that North Korea and Japan were the two least favored countries.²⁰ The United States was most favored by Koreans. However, when it comes to immigrants, the public showed the closest connection with North Korean defectors. This implies that South Korea's negative perception of North Korea as a country does not have bearing on their connection with North Koreans.

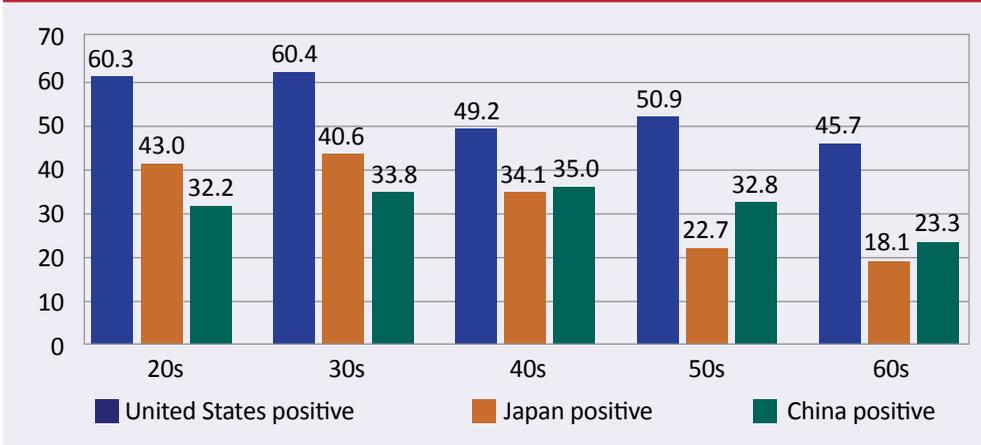
	Favorability
North Korea Defectors	0.59
Immigrants from China	0.41
Immigrants from USA	0.55
Immigrants from Japan	0.36

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

One aspect to note is the difference in the South Korean public's perception of immigrants from the United States, Japan, and China by age group. In particular, those who are in their twenties show higher favorability toward immigrants from Japan than immigrants from China, which is reversed for the elderly. While 54.3 percent of those in their 20s view immigrants from China negatively, 40.4 percent of them so view immigrants from Japan. On the contrary, it is 48.9 percent of those who are in their sixties whose attitudes are negative about immigrants from China. Antagonistic feeling toward Japan by this age cohort is much stronger; so that the percentage of them who see immigrants from Japan negatively is as high as 63.8 percent. Considering the argument that ethnic national identity of Koreans had originated from imperial Japan's racial discrimination against Korean people during colonial times, these numbers corroborate what I found above on national identity. South Korean youth are apparently overcoming hostile feelings originating from the colonial period, which are believed to be based on ethnic national identity, against Japan.²¹ (See Figure 1 and Figure 2)

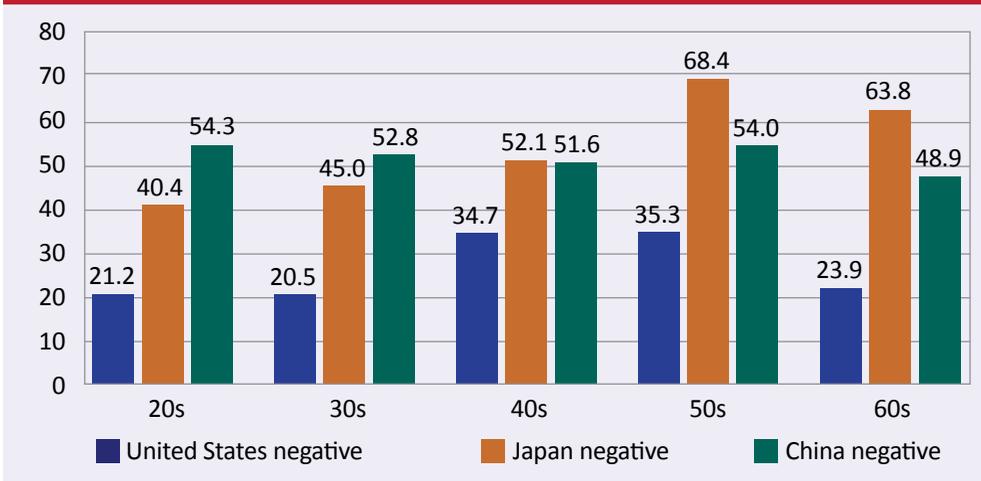
Next, I examined the views of North Korean defectors by age group. Previously, the data demonstrated that South Korean youth have weaker ethnic identity than the elderly. In addition, this group has a hostile attitude toward North Korea. Those findings may lead us to the conclusion that the young generation is more antagonistic toward North Korean defectors. Despite their weak ethnic bond, the outcome is the opposite. Whereas only 14.7 percent of those who are in their twenties disliked North Korean defectors, 29.2 percent of

Figure 1. Positive Feelings Toward Immigrants by Age Groups



Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

Figure 2. Negative Feelings Toward Immigrants by Age Groups



Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

those who are in their sixties or over did. In fact, 66 percent of South Korean youth have positive sentiment toward them. Only 52.6 percent of the elderly, who are believed to have the strongest ethnic bond with North Koreans, have any positive opinion of North Korean defectors. While there is a high proportion of “don’t know” answers, it is surprising to see that the youth are more welcoming despite their distant memory and weak ethnic identity of belonging to one, extended Korea. This is indeed an interesting finding because South Korean youth are known to be as conservative as the elderly when it comes to national security issues. In addition, they tend to be as hostile toward North Korea as the elderly. It appears that Korean youth are particularly apt to discern North Korea from North Korean people and defectors. Yet, it is not certain if identity politics plays any sort of a role (See Table 7).

Table 7. Feelings Toward North Korean Defectors by Age Groups

	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	Total
Very negative	3.7	5.5	2.8	4.5	6.5	4.7
Negative	11.0	20.0	13.3	21.2	22.7	18.2
Positive	55.8	52.4	60.2	53.9	41.4	51.9
Very positive	9.8	6.9	9.0	5.7	11.2	8.6
Don't Know	19.0	13.8	12.3	13.1	16.6	14.9
Refused	0.6	1.4	2.4	1.6	1.8	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

At the heart of this study is analysis of the impact of different types of national identity on attitudes toward North Korean defectors, centering on the distinction between ethnic identity and civic identity. For each question, I coded incrementally from 1 to 4, noting that 1 means “do not agree at all” while 4 means “agree very much” (2=do not agree, 3=agree on the whole). For instance, we ask a question whether or not being born in Korea is important to being Korean, a respondent chooses an answer, then the average score is calculated from the quantified answer to measure the level of agreement with the statement by respondents. The higher the score, the more Koreans think the element is important. Also, for the purpose of convenience, I classified attitudes toward North Korean defectors into two categories, positive or negative. For comparison, attitudes toward immigrants from the United States are added on the side as a reference. According to conventional wisdom, it is expected that those who have strong ethnic identity have more sympathetic and positive sentiments to North Korean defectors than those who have weak ethnic identity because strong ethnic identity is supposed to connect the South and the North. The result is, surprisingly, the opposite again.

First, I examine the generational difference on identity politics by comparing the scores (see Table 8). As the results in Table 7 demonstrate, most South Koreans consider that civic identity is more important than ethnic identity regardless of age group. Nonetheless, a large difference in the perceptions of significance is present among South Korean youth. The ethnic identity score for those who are in their twenties is 2.72 which is the lowest across age groups, and the civic identity score is 3.44. The difference of these two scores for this age cohort is .72, which is the largest across all generations. Compared with this, the spread between civic and ethnic identity scores for the elderly is much smaller. The result bodes well for changing national identity among the young generation.

Those who have a sympathetic and positive attitude toward North Korean defectors are less likely to agree that having the Korean bloodline is important to being Korean (2.95 v. 3.27). This tendency is found in all ethnic components. Those who think that living in Korea and being born in Korea are important qualities for being Korean tend to have a less favorable attitude toward North Korean defectors. When it comes to civic identity components, no discernible difference is found between those who have positive and negative attitudes toward North Korean defectors. A quite similar tendency is found in attitudes toward immigrants from

Table 8. Ethnic v. Civic Identity by Age Groups			
	Ethnic identity (A)	Civic identity (B)	Difference (B – A)
20s	2.72	3.44	0.72
30s	2.84	3.49	0.65
40s	2.88	3.52	0.64
50s	3.16	3.60	0.44
60s	3.44	3.74	0.30
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

the United States. While no gap was distinguished between civic identity scores of respondents who have positive and negative attitudes toward immigrants from the United States, there exist ethnic identity score differences. Apparently, those who have a stronger degree of ethnic identity tend to have a negative attitude toward immigrants from the United States, which was exactly the same propensity as seen in attitudes toward North Korean defectors (see Table 9).

Table 9. Ethnic and Civic Components: North Korean Defectors v. Immigrants from US			
		North Korean defector	Immigrants from the United States
ETHNIC COMPONENT			
Being born in Korea	Positive toward	3.08	3.09
	Negative toward	3.25	3.26
Having the Korean bloodline	Positive toward	2.95	2.97
	Negative toward	3.27	3.15
Living in Korea for most of one’s life	Positive toward	2.93	2.94
	Negative toward	3.11	3.08
CIVIC COMPONENT			
Maintaining Korean nationality	Positive toward	3.55	3.55
	Negative toward	3.57	3.60
Being able to speak and write in Korean	Positive toward	3.61	3.62
	Negative toward	3.65	3.64
Being able to speak and write in Korean	Positive toward	3.69	3.69
	Negative toward	3.59	3.64
Understanding Korean traditions	Positive toward	3.51	3.51
	Negative toward	3.53	3.52

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

I then generated indices for two identities by calculating the average values of responses to each question and conducted a t-test to compare different attitudes toward North Korean defectors. Simply put, the average scores of ethnic identity and civic identity are calculated and tested to see if there exists any significant difference between respondents who have positive and negative attitudes toward North Korean defectors. The test result confirms what I found above. The average score of ethnic identity for those who have a positive attitude is 2.98, while it is 3.22 for those who have a negative attitude. The difference was .23, a statistically significant finding. On the contrary, there was no significant difference in civic identity scores between these two groups. For those who have a positive attitude, the civic identity score was 3.59, and for those who have a negative attitude, it was 3.60 (see Table 10).

Table 10. Difference in Ethnic/Civic Identities by Attitude Toward North Korean Defectors			
Ethnic Identity	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Negative	220	3.22	0.66
Positive	594	2.98	0.71
		Difference = 0.23	t = 4.27
Civic Identity	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
Negative	220	3.60	0.42
Positive	607	3.59	0.42
		Difference = 0.01	t = .37

Source: Asan Daily Poll (Nov. 29-Dec. 1, 2013)

In sum, we can conclude that as a person sympathizes more with North Korean defectors, he or she is less likely to appreciate ethnic identity. In other words, a lower degree of ethnic identity helps a person have a positive and sympathetic sentiment toward North Korean defectors. This is, as a matter of fact, the same relationship I find in the analysis of immigrants. Those who have a lower level of ethnic identity tend to have a more accommodating attitude toward immigrants from the United States, China, and Japan. The civic identity did not discern the attitudinal differences.²²

It is expected that ethnic identity will have an adverse relationship with regard to a person's attitude toward immigrants and, more broadly, immigration issues. That is, the stronger one's degree of ethnic identity, the less favorable attitude he or she has on immigrants and immigration issues. On the contrary, those who have stronger civic identity are more likely to have a favorable attitude. The result, therefore, implies that Koreans stopped seeing North Korean defectors from the perspective of ethnic identity, but began to see them through the lens that they use to see immigrants from other countries.²³

This result partially explains why we see a much more favorable attitude toward North Korean defectors by South Korean youth. They emphasize civic identity more than ethnic identity to become Korean. Once they see North Korean defectors without the ethnic lens, North Korean defectors are one of various migrant groups. On that premise, young people who have strong civic identity and a low ethnic one are likely to display a more accommodating attitude toward the defectors wherever they come from.

CONCLUSION

On January 6, 2014, President Park Geun-hye held her first press conference since her inauguration. Although it took almost a year, she was successful in generating a huge media buzz. She laid out her economic plan, explained her position on the ongoing National Intelligence Service scandal and the prosecution process, and went through her foreign policies for 2014. What caught the most attention from the media and the Internet was her statement on Korean unification. During the Q&A session, she declared that, “unification, in my opinion, is hitting the jackpot (*daebak*).” Since the word *daebak* is a term most often used by the young generation and is slang not often used by politicians—let alone the president—it instantly became the most searched word on the Internet.

On December 31, 2013, *The Chosun Ilbo*, the newspaper in Korea with the largest number of subscribers, began a project entitled, “Special Report: Unification is the Future.” The report provided analyses of experts from various fields regarding the economic benefits South Korea can expect from unification. For example, the report quoted the famous investor Jim Rogers, who claimed that he would invest all his fortune in Korea if the Korean Peninsula were to be unified.

Thanks to Park’s press conference and the “Unification is the Future” project, unification quickly became a national buzzword. However, efforts to raise awareness of the economic benefits of unification underscore the fact that the South Korean public has deep reservations about it, most likely due to the perception that unification will be expensive, especially after witnessing the German unification.

Park’s remarks on the economic benefits of unification can be viewed as a good political move and an appropriate answer that addresses the public’s economic concerns. However, unification can be a “jackpot” only on the condition that the public still yearns for national unification. What if South Koreans no longer share an ethnic identity with North Koreans? Also, how would we mediate the discrepancies between the two peoples of the North and the South? These questions certainly shake the ground of the unification norm assumed by government and give reason to reconsider the whole economic benefit argument.

This study demonstrates that South Koreans do not view North Korean defectors in the framework of ethnic nationalism. Rather, they have begun to view the issue similar to an immigration issue. The important question for us, then, is what can we do to prepare for unification in which North and South Koreans can coexist together? Ironically, the answer seems to depend on how tolerant and mature the South Korean public is toward different ethnic groups. Given these findings, dealing with North Koreans under the assumption that they are “one of us” appears naïve and even dangerous. While it may go against the Korean norm, moving forward with the approach that North Koreans and South Koreans are members of two different countries, rather than one ethnic race, may be more realistic and practical. On that regard, fostering civic identity can provide an answer.

** The author is thankful to Mr. John J. Lee for his assistance.*

ENDNOTES

1. Korea Immigration Service *Monthly Statistics*, November 2013, http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/COM/bbs_003/ListShowData.do?strNbodCd=noti0097&strWrtNo=128&strAnsNo=A&strOrgGbnCd=104000&strRtnURL=IMM_6070&strAllOrgYn=N&strThisPage=1&strFilePath=imm/.
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10. Won-Taek Kang and Nae-Young Lee, *Understanding Korean Identity*.
11. Asan Daily Poll, March 29 and March 31. Another interesting finding is that the South Korean public is most concerned about ideological and cultural confusion after unification (31.4%). Economic cost follows as 30% of respondents states the most concerning issue of post-unification.
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18. Ae-Lee Sohn and Nae-Young Lee, “A Study on the Attitude of South Koreans Toward North Korean Defectors.”
19. The question was asked in a plain way such as “what do you think about immigrants from *the country* (the United States, China, Japan)?” Only for North Korean defectors, we did not use the term ‘immigrants’ but straightforwardly referred them to “North Korean defectors.”
20. On a 1 to 4 scale, Japan scored 2.57 and North Korea 2.37.
21. While the perceptions of immigrants vary across generational groups, ideological differences are hard to find.
22. I examined the ethnic identity score and attitudes toward North Korean defectors by age group so as to check if the age effect is overpowering. That is, the elderly who are believed to have a high ethnic identity score tend to have less positive attitudes toward North Korean defectors than the youth, which may result in a positive relationship between the high ethnic identity score and the negativity toward North Korean defectors. In fact, the ethnic identity score was higher among the groups negatively seeing North Korean defectors across generations except for those in their twenties. Ethnic identity scores of those in their 20s were almost exactly the same for both negative and positive viewers of North Korean defectors. For all other generational groups, those who view North Korean defectors negatively tend to have high ethnic identity scores.
23. The result corroborates the finding of the aforementioned Daily Poll results on South Korean views toward North Korea.