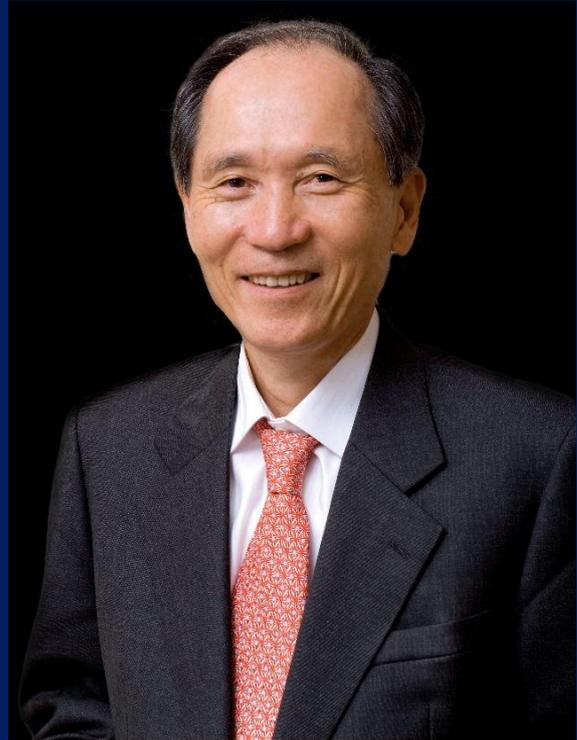


Jae Kyu Park

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I. INTRODUCTION

Founder of the Institute for Far Eastern Studies (IFES) and longtime President of Kyungnam University, Jae Kyu Park has been for decades a pioneer in North Korean and unification studies, builder in academia, and peacebuilder on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

At a time when such was virtually impossible inside South Korea, the IFES of Kyungnam University promoted and supported scholarly research on North Korea, providing related materials to academics and organizing conferences and seminars with the intent of promoting North Korean Studies as a type of area studies. On the basis of two decades of research and efforts, in 1998 Dr. Jae Kyu Park founded the University of North Korean Studies (UNKS) in Seoul, a graduate school dedicated to promoting a global understanding of North Korea, as well as providing expert knowledge on North Korea, inter-Korean relations, unification, and regional peace and security issues, among others. As experts on inter-Korean and unification issues, the university's graduates have gone on to work in various sectors of society, playing active and diverse roles in peacemaking and future unification processes on the Korean Peninsula.

Based on the recognition of his expertise and achievements, Dr. Park was asked to serve as the ROK Minister of Unification and Chairman of the National Security Council, posts which he held from 1999 to 2001. During his term in office at the ministry, Dr. Park was instrumental in organizing the landmark June 2000 inter-Korean summit, and headed the South Korean delegation to the South-North Ministerial-Level Talks.

Dr. Park has received numerous awards and honorary degrees over the years for his lifelong dedication and efforts toward not only peacebuilding but also toward university cooperation and reform. As a specialist on inter-Korean affairs, he has spoken widely on peace and unification, as well as having published numerous books, articles, and columns on the subject. He is also founder of the Northeast Asian Forum of University Presidents, an association that seeks to promote economic prosperity, enhance political democracy, and elevate human rights in Northeast Asia.

Currently, Dr. Park is President of Kyungnam University.

II. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Born in August 1944, Dr. Jae Kyu Park grew up in South Kyongsang Province of what is currently the Republic of Korea.

After completing secondary school, Dr. Park pursued undergraduate studies in Political Science in the United States at Fairleigh Dickinson University, where he received a Bachelor's degree in 1967. He continued on in the field and completed a Master's degree at City University of New York in 1969 and a PhD in Political Science at Kyung Hee University, Seoul, in 1974.

His professional career began at Kyungnam University in 1973 as an associate professor, a position he held until 1985. During that span of time, Dr. Park served as the dean of the Graduate School for eight years, vice president of Kyungnam University for four years, and most notably, he established the Institute for Far Eastern Studies (IFES) and served as its director from 1973 to 1986. In 1986, he became president of Kyungnam University, a position he held for fourteen consecutive years. During these fourteen years, Dr. Park also served short terms as chairman of the Korean President Association of Private Universities (1996–1997), as well as vice chairman and later president of the Korean University Presidents Association (1995–1996, 1997–1999).

However, monumental developments in South Korean politics would lead him out of his much loved academia and into government in December 1999 as Dr. Park was appointed Minister of Unification for the Republic of Korea and tasked with chairing the Standing Committee of the National Security Council. His presence on the political stage and toward furthering world peace was soon felt, for he played a most instrumental role in bringing about the historic first-ever inter-Korean summit of June 15, 2000. During this momentous event, Dr. Park chaired the summit's organizing committee, and continued to play major roles in both the post-summit's and ministerial-level talks as the head of the South Korean delegation until the spring of 2001. Notably, in September 2000, through his direct negotiation with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il, Dr. Park helped bring to fruition inter-Korean railway agreements and South-North Korea Defense Ministerial Talks. In 2005, Dr. Park again made a significant contribution as an advisor of the special envoy team to North Korea that led to the North Korean leader's declaration to return to six-party talks for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

III. CURRICULUM VITAE

Education

- 1967 BA in Political Science, Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA
1969 MA in Political Science, City University of New York, USA
1974 PhD in Political Science, Kyung Hee University, Korea

Professional Career (Academia/Foundations)

- 2003–present President, Kyungnam University
2003–2010 Chairman, Northeast Asian Forum of University Presidents
2005–2009 President, University of North Korean Studies
2005–2009 Chairman, Isang Yun Peace Foundation
2001–2004 Chairman, Korean University Presidents Association
1986–1999 President, Kyungnam University
1973–1986 Director, Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University
1973–1985 Professor, Kyungnam University

Professional Career (Government/Political Appointments)

- 2009.02–present Presidential Advisor on Korean Unification Affairs
2006.05–2008.11 Presidential Advisor on Korean Unification Affairs
2000.07–2001.03 Delegation Head, South–North Korea Ministerial-Level Talks
2000.04–2000.06 Chairman, Organizing Committee for Inter-Korean Summit
1999.12–2001.03 Minister, ROK Ministry of Unification
1999.12–2001.03 Chairman, National Security Council (NSC)

Publications

- *The Foreign Policy of North Korea*, 1977
- *North Korean Military Policy*, 1983
- *The Politics of North Korea*, 1984
- *The Foreign Relations of North Korea: New Perspectives* (ed.), 1987
- *New Diplomacy of North Korea and Its Survival Strategy*, 1997
- *A Guide to Understanding North Korea* (ed.), 1997
- *New Readings on North Korea* (ed.), 2004
- *The Dilemma and Future of North Korea* (ed.), 2011
- *A New Story of Unification* (ed.), 2017
- *A Road to Peaceful Unification* (ed.), 2017
- *A New Story of North Korea* (ed.), 2018

Awards and Honors

- Special Award, New York Press Research Committee, 1980
- Honorary Doctoral Degree in Law, Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA, 1987
- Honorary Doctoral Degree, Russian Economic Academy, Russia, 1992
- Honorary Doctoral Degree in International Relations, Far Eastern National University, Russia, 1997
- Honorary Doctoral Degree in Education, Khabarovsk State Pedagogical University, Russia, 1998
- Award for Global Understanding, Fairleigh Dickinson University, USA, 2001
- Honorary Doctoral Degree, Kanagawa University, Japan, 2001
- Order of Service Merit Blue Stripes, Republic of Korea, 2002
- Unification Grand Prize, Center for Cultural Unification Studies of Korea & Hankook Ilbo, Republic of Korea, 2003
- Special Prize of the Jury (Prize for Conflict Prevention), The Chirac Foundation, France, 2009
- Green Leadership Award (Education Sector), Kyunghyang Shinmun and Korea Forest Service, Republic of Korea, 2010
- Award for Best Executive in Korea (Education), Dong-a Ilbo, 2013
- Honorary Doctoral Degree in Political Science, Chinese Culture University, Taiwan, 2015
- Award of Highest Honor, Soka University, Japan, 2015
- Honorary Doctoral Degree, Soka University, Japan, 2016

IV. INTERVIEW

An ‘Iron Hand’ Bridges the Korean Divide*

*Interview with President Jae Kyu Park, written by Angela Carfagna and published in *FDU Magazine Online* (Summer/Fall 2007). View original at <https://portal.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/07sf/park.html>.

The most fortified border in the world divides the Korean Peninsula. But Jae Kyu Park, BA’67 (R), has a talent for crossing borders.

As a young man, he ventured from his native South Korea across the globe to the New York metropolitan area, eventually studying at FDU’s Rutherford Campus.

As the president of Kyungnam University in Masan, South Korea, for the last two decades, he has led the development of partnerships and programs with institutions throughout the world.

And, as the minister of unification, he played a pivotal role in the historic North-South Korean Summit in 2000, which took a major step toward the reconciliation of the two estranged lands.

Park’s leadership in higher education and international relations has made him one of Korea’s most respected and influential individuals. In one lengthy profile, the *Korea Times* described him as an “iron hand in a velvet glove” because of his “gentle appearance” and “sturdy spirit.”

With his typical modesty, he is quick to deflect praise. “I’ve been fortunate enough over the years to be at the right place at the right time; and, luckily, I have been able to make a contribution at those times.”

Much has figured in this prominent man’s path, but luck hardly explains his remarkable string of achievements.

Coming to America

Born in Masan, which lies in South Kyongsang Province, Park lived in a remote fishing village, and he says education provided an “escape” to the city. By the time he entered Masan High School, he began to dream of going abroad. In 1963, he traveled to New York City and studied English at Columbia University’s language institute.



At the June 2000 summit in Pyongyang, North Korea, Jae Kyu Park, left, spoke with North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il.

Park recalls the challenge of learning another language. “Pronunciation practice in particular was a wrestling match for my tongue—the clerks at the supermarket didn’t know if I was asking for soup or soap.”

Following a year in New York, Park enrolled at FDU. “I wanted to be close to New York, but in a cozier, more community-oriented place, something a bit more familiar and like home. Proximity, character and the people of Rutherford made ‘the Castle’ an ideal choice.”

Park majored in international relations, and although he says he spent many late nights studying to keep up with his peers, he “enjoyed campus life immensely, and the hard work sure paid off.”

Park then received a scholarship to attend graduate school at the City College of New York (CCNY), where he began to develop a deep interest in North Korean studies, a passion he describes as his “lifetime assignment.” He later earned diplomas from the University of Exeter in England and the New School University in New York and gained his PhD from Kyunghee University in South Korea.

Building a Global University

Upon his return to South Korea, Park put his studies on hold in order to complete his country’s mandatory military service. Fittingly enough, he was stationed with an army division that conducted information analysis on North Korea.

After military duty, Park began teaching at Kyungnam University, then a relatively small institution. Then, he established the Institute for Far Eastern Studies (IFES), which, declared the *Korea Times*, “became the Mecca of North Korean studies.”

The institute works to promote peace and the unification of Korea through scholarly projects focusing on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. Park says, “I am confident that IFES is the most active research organization in the area of Korea’s reunification and security.”

Park soon moved into the administration, becoming vice president of Kyungnam in 1982 and then landing the leadership role as president in 1986. Among other accomplishments, he has further extended the University’s global outreach.

Kyungnam now has academic agreements with 43 universities in 15 countries, including the United States, Japan and Russia. These links include an English training and immersion program held each summer at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

The institution, which last year celebrated its 60th anniversary and has more than 15,000 students, also is recognized for excellence in vocational education and its alliances with the local region and industry.

Perhaps above all, the University has gained widespread recognition for its work in the area of North Korean studies. Building on the work of the Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Park and Kyungnam created the Graduate School of North Korean Studies, which he says, is designed to provide “expert knowledge on North Korea and inter-Korean relations” and to equip students “with the practical training and theoretical knowledge that will help them play active roles in future peacemaking and unification processes.” Expanded in 2004 to the University of North Korean Studies, this is the only recognized graduate school in the world specializing in North Korean affairs and Korea’s reunification issues.

Family Ties at FDU

While building Kyungnam, Park has kept close with his *alma mater*. “I have as much love for FDU as I do for Kyungnam University,” he says.

In addition to helping develop collaborative programs, Park formed FDU’s first international alumni chapter and served on the Alumni Association Board of Governors. He also has generously supported FDU, in particular contributing to the renovation of the Rutherford Room at the Metropolitan Campus, which features photos and memorabilia from FDU’s original campus. Park loves the campus so much that whenever he visits the area, he always takes time to walk the grounds, which are now home to Felician College.

“I was blessed with meeting so many truly wonderful people while studying there. Many of the friendships I developed back then have lasted to this day. The place is like a second home to me, and many of the people I’ve got to know through FDU have become like family.”

And one he met at FDU did become family. It was at the Rutherford Campus that Park met his future wife, Sun Hyang Kim. The couple has two children and their son, Jeong Jin, in May completed his graduate studies in public administration at FDU’s Metropolitan Campus. “I know his experience was rewarding,” says Park, adding,



On a recent visit to Fairleigh Dickinson University, Jae Kyu Park, BA '67 (R), center, visited with his close friend Professor Emeritus Malcolm Sturchio, left, and University President J. Michael Adams.

“who knows, maybe my grandson will be roaming the halls at Teaneck some time down the road.”

When he was roaming the FDU halls in the 1960s, Park met Malcolm Sturchio, now professor emeritus of chemistry. The two became close friends, and when Park was married at a small ceremony at a chapel in the United Nations, Sturchio was the only American at the affair. “He’s an amazing guy,” says Sturchio. “He’s very mild mannered, but he’s incredibly determined. And when he says something, you can take it to the bank.”

Sturchio adds that Park is “a visionary leader who took this small school and built it into a major institution with programs throughout the world.”

Park’s extraordinary achievements in education and international relations have several times been acknowledged by his *alma mater*. In 1987, he was awarded an honorary LLD from the University. He also was honored in 1989 as an inaugural member of The PINNACLE, given annually to outstanding alumni, and he received the University’s Charter Day Award in 2001.

Among his many other efforts, Park has served as chairman of the Korean President Association of Private Universities and president of the Korean University Presidents Association. A prolific author of many books and articles, his major publications include *Cold War and U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Asia* and *New Diplomacy of North Korea and Its Survival Strategy*.

Sturchio has seen first-hand the level of recognition Park enjoys in Korea today. “You cannot walk down a street in Korea without someone knowing who he is,” he says, adding that Park is a regular fixture in Korean national media. His place in Korean society was noticeably enhanced by his role in the historic summit of 2000.

‘Best Supporting Actor’

On Christmas Eve, 1999, Park received a call from South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, who asked him to take on the job of minister of unification. Park’s knowledge and expertise in North Korean studies made him a logical choice. The administration’s “sunshine policy” sought to cooperate and reconcile with the North. This process culminated in the June 2000 summit in North Korea’s capital, Pyongyang, which some regard as the finest achievement in world peace in the latter half of the 20th century.

Labeled “Best Supporting Actor” by the *Korea Times*, Park chaired the summit’s organizing committee and then continued to play a major role in both the post-summit and ministerial-level talks as the head of the South Korean delegation through the spring of 2001.



Jae Kyu Park delivered a speech on “North Korea and Prospects for Inter-Korean Relations” for the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in January 2006.

“I was fortunate to have had the president’s support and trust in my opinion and analysis of North Korea,” Park says. “If you know and understand anything about the history of modern Korea, then you’ll know how unbelievably exhilarating it was to have traveled to Pyongyang and to have been able to witness the summit in which the two leaders met face to

face, shook hands and conducted serious talks.”

This was the first time the top leaders of the two Koreas had ever met. The summit, which produced the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration, was a “truly momentous event,” says Park, “because it helped transform South-North relations from hostility and confrontation to reconciliation and cooperation.”

Among other things, the joint declaration indicated that the North and South would work together toward reunification, promote the balanced development of the national economy and encourage cooperation and exchanges in all fields.

“The summit ushered in a new era of amity, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to play a part,” Park says. “After a half century of enmity, the two Koreas are now moving forward with a cooperative spirit to reconcile their differences and build a future of peace and prosperity together. Words cannot express the joy and hope I felt at that moment when the two leaders of the divided Koreas shared a toast at the end of the summit.”

Park also is famous for his personal meeting following the summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, when he visited him at Kim’s ranch in a reclusive northern area. “I found him to be quite sharp and on top of what’s going on around him,” Park recalls. “He was willing to listen to his guest, even try to understand me. He tried to be friendly. His authority, however, seemed unchallengeable.”

He adds, “Personally, I believe he is a man who is very aware of the challenges he faces and the constraints placed upon him. He has his own agenda, policy goals and

roadmap, and I hope he will be successful in the normalization of relations with the United States and Japan through the peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue.”

Park says that North Korea’s nuclear arms program has created an impasse in U.S.-North Korean relations, and that both sides “need to show more flexibility and understanding as they work to overcome their differences.”

Reform will happen in the North, Park believes, but it will be slow and gradual. “We should not be impatient.”

Since the summit, Park says that “great steps toward achieving the ultimate goal of reunification have been made, but I believe there is much work to be done before we can get there.”

He adds, “Although the North Korean nuclear test last October was an unfortunate setback, I believe both Koreas are still committed to laying the groundwork for perpetuating peace on the peninsula. Through that commitment to ensuring peace, reunification will eventually come.”

Park has stepped away from the political scene now, while focusing on building Kyungnam University, but he says he hopes to continue working and doing all he can to further the reconciliation process. “In particular, I shall strive strenuously to train the next generations who can and will shoulder the burden of unification in the years ahead.”

V. MEMOIR

My Thirty Years of North Korean Research*

By Jae Kyu Park

*translation, 2007

In 1967, little did I know that a lecture entitled “Socialist Economics” given at the City University of New York (CUNY) would transform my life. At the time, I was a student pursuing my master’s degree at CUNY. Driven by an interest in international politics and US foreign policy toward East Asia, with an aim to later work at the United Nations (UN) as a diplomat, in 1963 I had boarded a plane for America to go to university. While pursuing my bachelor’s degree at Fairleigh Dickinson University (FDU), I aspired to be a diplomat; I had no intentions of making North Korean research the ultimate pursuit of my life. As a witness to the calamity of the Korean War and the trauma it had caused, I fully realized the importance of US foreign policy toward East Asia and its significance for the survival and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula. As I adapted to college, the majority of the electives in which I enrolled related to economics. After completing my bachelor’s degree, I entered CUNY to pursue a master’s. During my graduate years at CUNY, a lecture on the economics of the Soviet Union given by Professor Peter Wiles captivated me. Professor Wiles was, at the time, an exchange professor from the London School of Economics (LSE) and a world-renowned socialist economist. Because of hostile inter-Korean relations, showing even the slightest sympathy for “socialism” was tantamount to risking one’s life. Luckily, I was able to enhance my understanding and knowledge of socialist countries like the Soviet Union—the other axis of the Cold War—through this meaningful lecture. At the time I believed that gaining a deeper insight into socialist countries’ East Asian policies was a prerequisite to understanding US foreign policy toward East Asia.

A Fateful Meeting: The Beginning of My “North Korea Research”

As I showed great enthusiasm for his lectures, Professor Wiles began to take an interest in me. In the process of preparing for his classes, I was able to get my hands on numerous socialist materials—which were hard to acquire in South Korea—from my visits to the United Nations’ Library and the US Library of Congress. Professor Wiles shared my interest in socialist North Korea, likely motivated by the need for comparative studies on socialist economies. He was especially intrigued by the mutual hostility between the two Koreas despite their shared ethnicity. One day he suggested

that I focus my studies on North Korea, stating that academic and practical demands on North Korea would be significantly amplified in the near future, and that I might be able to acquire a scholarship to pursue such studies under a doctoral program at the London School of Economics. I thus began reading the data published by North Korea and was constantly amazed at the differences between the two Koreas. Then one day it finally dawned upon me that gaining deeper insight into North Korea was indispensable for the eventual unification of the Korean Peninsula. Studying the “forbidden field” of North Korea was in itself exciting, but what truly fueled my passion for such study was the thought of the sorrow the people of both Koreas would feel if they had to live under a divided nation indefinitely. The intellectual stimulation I experienced during those times was so intense it was often difficult for me to adjust to the world that was opening before me. I repeatedly reminded myself, “A person should not return home until they have achieved what they have set out to do.”

Little did I know at the time that my fateful encounter with Professor Wiles would eventually mark a major turning point in my life. In hindsight, he was the inspiration that made possible the establishment of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies (IFES) and the University of North Korean Studies (UNKS).

But my studies would have to wait. While pursuing my doctoral degree at the New School of Social Research of New York in 1970, I was called back home to fulfill my military duties. It was on the plane ride back to Korea that I decided to “walk the neglected path” and pursue research on North Korea as the major task of my life. I had a simple but audacious ambition to contribute to the unification of the Korean Peninsula through my research.

Yet with inter-Korean relations being what they were in the Cold War of the 1970s, and with the nation focused on economic development, embarking on such a task was considered a huge risk. For South Korea, a crucial factor in achieving the desired economic development was the establishment of scientific industries and manufacturing sites. As a result, attention and support for both the public and private sector were almost exclusively focused on the fields of science and engineering. One could not even remotely expect assistance for any kind of social science-related project, let alone North Korea-related research.

Founding of the Unification and Korean Conflict Research Institute, September 1972

Back in the early 1970s, my conviction—which has never wavered—was this: “Surrounded by major powers, Korea is a tiny but mighty nation still coping with a painful national division. The order of international relations and Korean unification cannot be altered for the better without significant contribution from the social sciences.” I was adamant, and could not wait for support to come. Even before the excitement over the North-South Joint Communiqué of July 4, 1972 subsided, and despite the reservations expressed by those around me, I founded the Unification and Korean Conflict Research Institute in September 1972—the predecessor of IFES. From this point on, my research on North Korea became synonymous with the work of IFES.

Nongovernmental research on North Korea, unification, and regional peacebuilding is readily accepted now, but back in those days it was virtually impossible for a private academic institute to conduct research on such issues. Indeed, many were apathetic or even frowned upon the very idea of establishing such an institute. However, I vowed to prove everyone wrong by building a reputable “exemplary institute.” My primary objective was to lay the foundation for research on North Korea and other socialist regimes—which, at the time, was virtually nonexistent in South Korea—as well as to develop a database for information and knowledge in this area in order to assist in peacebuilding and the eventual unification of the Korean Peninsula. In the realm of international politics, where world powers continuously compete for power and interests, unscientific, ideological, and biased perceptions on North Korea were obstructing our path to coordinating the existence of “one Korea.” Hence, my focus at the time was bringing awareness to “real” facts and proposing viable theories through research. This was not a simple task. Access to resources was strictly limited. We lacked suitable theoretical models in which to study North Korea. We were also ill-equipped, lacking the proper resources and networks to conduct the desired level of research. Although we are still working to improve in these areas today, we have come a long way from our modest beginnings. Now that the toughest times have past, I am able to talk of our past hardships as cherished memories. Sometimes, I even miss those reckless, spirited days and the passion that burned within.

My Days at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies



Located in a building in Seoul was a small office with conditions so shabby that even the heaters did not function properly during the winter. This was the Institute for Far Eastern Studies in its earliest days. Next to the unreliable heaters, the only thing that kept us warm during the cold winter months was a hot cup of coffee. Our lack of experience and the shortage of staff made it unthinkable for any one of us to ask for holidays, let alone a day off. What kept me going most during those long hours and days of work was the promise I had made to myself on the airplane in 1970—that promise, and my youth! Most distressing was not the physical fatigue but rather the lack of resources, which made my research activity extremely difficult.

Back then, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) monopolized the majority of North Korea-related resources in South Korea. My numerous visits to the Agency, however, made me aware of the limitations of what even they had. Today, it is fairly easy to obtain research materials from practically anywhere in the world via the Internet; however, in the Cold War days when ideological control was strictly enforced by the government, it was utterly impossible to request for the expansion of North Korea-related data. Ultimately, seeking information and resources for the sake of research had to be done through personal means. As a result, I often found myself flying to the United States and Japan to visit distributors of communist books in order to assemble my own collection of material resources. Like the Chinese Communist Party's *Little Red Book*, which explains the party's ideology, the covers of most of the books on North Korea were red. As ridiculous as it sounds, at a time when it was illegal for South Koreans to read North Korea's *Rodong Sinmun* (the official newspaper of the Workers' Party of Korea) even in foreign countries, getting materials related to communism through South Korean customs was a near impossible mission. Every time I returned home carrying what to me were valuable research materials, airport customs would put on a special alert and carp about what I was doing. Despite the hardships, through this process I was able to gather, analyze, and accumulate information on North Korea and compare it with data on other socialist countries. As time went by and my knowledge deepened, I developed the ability to interpret and analyze North Korea and make my own deductions on related issues. What resulted was the publication of "Structural Analysis of North Korean Society" and "Peace and Security of Northeast Asia" in 1972 and

1975, respectively. Although the level of insight in these publications is too shallow to boast of, these writings are dear to my heart, as these were the first official products of my early years of research on North Korea.

As the director of IFES, I was conscious of the need for an academic exchange of ideas and resources among scholars and experts in the fields of North Korean studies, unification, and international relations. I therefore came to the conclusion that it was essential to turn the institute into a place where various scholars and experts could freely interact, gather, and exchange ideas with one another while conducting research. Not only would this broaden a researcher's perspective and help overcome the limitations of individual research, but this interaction would help bring social awareness of issues pertaining to North Korea and unification. I firmly believed that this process could significantly enhance the standard of North Korea research. So we set our sights on hosting an academic conference where domestic and international scholars could gather and share ideas, and we eventually held one in Washington D.C. in April 1973. I do not recall its exact title, but I believe the theme was the Korean Peninsula, the surrounding powers, and their roles in the region.

Hosting the First International Conference in Korea



One of my most unforgettable memories was our hosting the first-ever large-scale international conference in South Korea in January 1974 at the Westin Chosun Hotel. Our theme was “Peace and Security of Northeast Asia.” Today, the conferences hosted by IFES are quite well organized. Back then, however, we were totally ignorant about what to do. No other Korean institution had ever sponsored a conference of this magnitude. We were operating without a model, so the preparatory stage for our conference was extremely difficult, not to mention the difficulties we faced in compiling the conference materials, as the copy machines available today did not exist back in those days. Nevertheless, with the assistance of foreign institutions, we were able to bring this conference together. It turned out to be a huge success, with its results published into a book entitled, *Peace and Security of Northeast Asia*. The joy I felt because of this success is indescribable.

This conference acted as a cornerstone for both me and the institute to expand our research scope to include the international order of Northeast Asia and its foreign policies, as well as, incidentally, the social sciences. During my graduate student years in 1976, I had published a book, *The Cold War and U.S. Policy Towards Asia*, which dealt with US foreign policy toward Northeast Asia. Now, with this expansion, I was again able to return to such study. During my years as director of IFES until 1986, the majority of our international conferences (including “Nuclear Proliferation Prospects of Developing Countries,” “The Soviet Union and Northeast Asia,” and “Strategies for Peace and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula,” to name a few) concentrated on Asia’s international politics and policies surrounding the Korean Peninsula. While the major diplomatic events were focused on international relations, North Korea was always the core of my study, and *North Korean Military Policy* and *The Politics of North Korea*, published in 1983 and 1984, respectively, were two products of my research.

A “Paradise” for Scholars



Samcheong-dong is a neighborhood in Seoul well known for its fresh air and quiet surroundings. Anyone who has visited the neighborhood will agree that there is no better location in the city for scholars and researchers. This is where IFES set up its modest base in 1979. Since then, the institute has grown and the facilities have been modernized. The main building that one sees today was actually constructed in 1986. Although relatively small in size, its design and sophistication matches that of any other research facility in the world. Some people who have visited have referred to our perch on the hill as a “paradise” for scholars. It is a flattering compliment, but I feel proud when I hear this, because I do believe that there are not many private academic research institutes comparable to IFES in scenic beauty. I am especially proud that this facility has served young scholars and Korean scholars who faced difficulties finding a place to conduct research due to their participation in past democratic movements. For them, IFES has been a place to congregate, work, and contribute to Korea’s national development. Since the construction of the main building, our academic activities have thrived and our facility has received visitors on a constant basis.

In 1989, as the former Eastern bloc unraveled, IFES hosted an international conference entitled “World Transition and Marxism.” Despite South Korea’s sweeping democratization movement at the time, the general public still lacked the knowledge to make an objective assessment of Marxism. In this regard, our conference was just as unconventional in size and content as the symposium we held in 1974. Just like years ago when I first embarked upon my research, I felt that enhancing our knowledge of Marxism was essential if we were to make accurate deductions regarding North Korea and respond correspondingly to the transition going on throughout much of the world.

The response was astounding. Many internationally distinguished scholars such as Jürgen Kuczynski (German economist), Frederic R. Jameson (American political theorist), Bob Jessop (British political sociologist), Alain Lipietz (French engineer and economist), Immanuel Wallerstein (American sociologist), and Elmar Altvater (German political scientist) participated in the conference. I was further dazzled by the attention we received from the public. This conference put IFES on the map, so to speak, both in academia and with the general public. It was an outcome we had not anticipated when we started in our small, shabby office in 1972. Upon the introduction of the institute’s membership system on data usage, more than a thousand people—students, scholars, professionals, and others—signed up. Many have remained members to this day. For us, it was a clear indication that our academic activities were receiving approval in academia and gaining public support.

Collapse of North Korea?—Hasty Predictions upon the Death of Kim Il Sung

One of the most significant activities of IFES is the publication of its academic journals, *Asian Perspective* and *Korea and World Politics*. The first issue of *Asian Perspective* (published in English) appeared in 1977, and I remember writing the following phrase on the preface: “Today we publish the first issue of this journal with modesty and pride. Hopefully this journal will act as a liaison for academic exchange and discovery for those interested in the politics, economics, and social sciences of Asia.” Today the journal is widely distributed in sixty-nine countries, serving as a channel of information exchange among scholars. It has established itself as an exemplary academic publication in Asia and was even honored by the National Research Foundation of Korea as the best international academic journal. Our Korean-language journal, *Korea and World Politics*, was first published in 1985 as a fruitful outcome of academic efforts

to guide South Korea's diplomatic policies in the international arena, and is recognized today as one of the most prestigious Korean journals of political science.

While striving to heighten both the domestic and international reputation of IFES in part through its journal publications, my own research began to shift in two new directions. First, it was evident that North Korea would turn to the international community after the collapse of the Soviet Union. My main and primary focus, then, was to research North Korea's diplomacy. Second but equally significant was how to turn this moment in history to our advantage and take measures to enhance the quality of research and education on North Korea.

In 1987, I co-authored a book entitled *The Foreign Relations of North Korea* together with Korean-American scholar Byung Chul Koh. While writing this book, I carefully assessed the possibility for change in North Korea. In other words, I was keenly aware that as tightly controlled as North Korea is, the time would soon come for its government to realize that adopting an open-door policy would be necessary if it wished to survive. Then DPRK president Kim Il Sung died suddenly in July 1994. His unexpected death caused a great sensation internationally, especially with a historic inter-Korean summit scheduled to take place in just a few months. Heated debate followed in the academic community on topics including who would be the viable successor to Kim Il Sung, and whether or not North Korea would collapse.

I simply could not agree with those prognosticating the "collapse" scenario. My years of research had shown me that Kim Jong Il, the deceased president's son, had been in training since the 1970s to take over the "throne" at some point in time, and that there were really no obstacles to prevent him from doing so. I doubt my conjecture had much of a voice over the predominating belief that the collapse of North Korea was imminent, but to think that it contributed a little toward improving the nation's perception of North Korea was definitely uplifting. However, I could not suppress my remorse and apprehension over how misinformed the general public had become.

Founding of the University of North Korean Studies

The shift in the international political atmosphere caused by the passing of Kim Il Sung once again kindled my passion for doing research on North Korea's diplomacy. The sudden death of North Korea's leader, who had held absolute power over a state which was virtually isolated and had few political alliances, created anxiety among the

neighboring states and especially in South Korea. In February 1997, my concern over the possible deterioration of inter-Korean relations rapidly increased. In a book entitled *New Diplomacy of North Korea and Its Survival Strategy*, I describe North Korea's diplomacy under recent successor Kim Jong Il as "Policy to Open Up to the West." Kim Jong Il was aggressively pursuing the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States and Japan, and my prediction was that he would also enforce a rather active and contentious diplomatic strategy with countries in Europe and Southeast Asia. However, with the nation's limited financial capability, it seemed likely that North Korea would establish ties with major cities—New York, Washington, Tokyo, Berlin, Bangkok, etc.—and attempt to build a network with these cities as the primary axis for communication with the outside world. I had no doubt at this time that this "new diplomacy" was indispensable for North Korea's survival.

In July 1997, a few months after the book's publication, the former secretary of the Worker's Party of Korea defected to the South. The media approach to this incident was comparable to how it had reported Kim Il Sung's death. As if to prove the unaltered perception we had toward North Korea, the belief that war was imminent permeated throughout the country and the "North Korea collapse theory" reemerged. I remember writing a column for a newspaper article and commenting that fueling the fears of war "may give North Korea a chance to pull this situation to their advantage and manipulate us. . . . Regime collapse is improbable as long as Kim Jong Il lives." This prediction turned out to be true. Or rather, it might be more accurate to say that our society's perception and knowledge of North Korea was still shallow.

These events only affirmed my conviction of the urgent need for systematic education on North Korea and related issues. This in part motivated me to establish a graduate school devoted to North Korean studies. Skeptics questioned the value of such formal study of a declining regime. Some suggested that I establish a graduate school on East Asian policy instead. Reflecting, however, on my original determination in establishing IFES, I resolved not to succumb to public opinion and decided to once again "walk the neglected path." In 1998, after much difficulty and delay, the Graduate School of North Korean Studies was founded.

North Korea's "New Diplomacy" and the Defection of Hwang Jang Yop



Perhaps the idea to set up a graduate school focused on North Korean studies really began with the establishment of IFES back in 1972. Back then I had plans to set up a so-called “North Korea Academy.” This plan progressed as unprecedented changes were unfolding in inter-Korean relations, one of which was the signing of the North-South Joint Communiqué on July 4, 1972. Cultivating talented people who could make genuine contributions to inter-Korean exchange and cooperation seemed like an urgent task. But such efforts hit a brick wall as inter-Korean relations deteriorated, leaving me with no option but to put this off until a later time. Nevertheless, with advice and assistance from domestic and international scholars, I continued making preparations to establish a graduate school whose curriculum could offer its students the theories and practical experiences they would need to become true “experts” in the field. In 1998, the time finally came. The positive feedback I received on the founding of the graduate school was greater than I had hoped for—indeed, it caught me by surprise. The response from world-renowned academics such as Young-Rok Ku, Bae-Ho Han, Young-Hee Lee, Samuel Kim, Dae-Suk Suh, Masao Okonoki, and Mikhail Nossov were immensely positive. These men and many others even graciously offered to lecture at the school as visiting professors. Moreover, the students who enrolled were not the typical graduate students freshly out of college. In fact, the school’s first class consisted of professors, researchers with doctorates in other fields, and professionals from politics, government, media, NGOs, and business corporations. Even from day one, the constituents of the school actually represented a microcosm of our society’s experts on North Korean research.

Over the years, the graduate school had continue to grow quickly, and in 2005 it eventually separated from its parent institution, Kyungnam University—where I was serving as president—and stepped out on its own, becoming the University of North Korean Studies.

Establishment of the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Academy and Publication of North Korean Studies Textbooks

While I was serving as the president of Kyungnam University, we began to publish an academic journal entitled *Review of North Korean Studies* in the hopes of establishing a new milestone in the field of North Korean research. Another program that was initiated at around this time was the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Academy. Cosponsored with *Hankyoreh*, a daily newspaper agency in South Korea, this was the first systematic academic program geared toward teaching the “nuts and bolts” of North-South Korean economic cooperation to interested individuals, especially businessmen and professionals in the trade industry. Not only did the program become a center for information exchange for its members, but today it has grown to be an actual place for interaction and cooperation between the North and the South.

We also began to compile materials for a textbook that could be used as a resource for lectures on North Korea, a project I had long wanted to do. At the time, college lectures on North Korea were increasing; however, with the pervasive lack of understanding of North Korea among both the public and professionals, the assessments reached in many of these lectures were unconvincing. Realizing that our education on North Korea up to that point was focused mainly on anti-communism and its ideologies, I was determined to reconstruct North Korean studies on an academic foundation with strict standards for research. Even in the mid-1990s, students who expressed views on North Korea that clashed with the mainstream were rebuked, preventing a heightened level of academic discussion from taking place. Luckily, the Regional University Consortium of Korea—formed as a result of cooperation among several colleges in the central and the southern regions—agreed to assist in the compilation of such a textbook. With the assistance of the consortium and key technical support from IFES, *A Guide to Understanding North Korea*, our first textbook on the DPRK, was published in 1997.

First Visit to North Korea, October 1998—Toward Unification

“When will I ever get a chance to visit North Korea?” This was a question I had long thought about, not simply because I had made North Korea the focus of my lifelong research, but also because my father-in-law actually used to be a professor at Kim Il Sung University. One day the opportunity knocked on my door as the Graduate School of North Korean Studies started gaining nationwide recognition. I was serving as the

president of the Korea Council of University Presidents at the time, and I was offered an invitation by Kim Chaek University of Technology to visit North Korea for the purpose of academic exchange.



In October 1998, I headed to Pyongyang with an excitement I had not felt since IFES first opened its doors in the 1970s. When I landed in the city, I knew I was setting foot on Korean soil. But when I spoke to the North Koreans, I could not help but feel a sense of heterogeneity. The differences between the North and South that I had described to people and lectured about to students became all the more real. At one point tears filled my eyes as I realized how different we had become—we are of the same race, we North and South Koreans, yet fifty years of separation had transformed us into peoples with opposing political ideologies and beliefs. On my flight back to Beijing, I was able to ease some of the sorrow I felt as I realized that my visit to North Korea did reaffirm our common identity, which is something that could bring us closer to the path to unification. I told myself, “North Korea willingly invited a South Korean scholar to visit. Doesn’t this fact in and of itself represent change?” Through this visit, I was able to attest to North Korea’s stable regime and to continue to work toward solving the conundrum of inter-Korean relations. As the plane crossed out of the North and over the ocean, I hoped to visit North Korea frequently in the future and to play some role in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. I kept repeating to myself, “The day when we can freely travel between these skies may be approaching. Maybe the process has already begun. Since the separation half a century ago, visits to the North will commence for the first time ever through tourism starting in November. With the recent progress, unification will come before we know it.”

On New Year’s Eve of 1999, I reminisced about the founding of IFES and the University of North Korean Studies. Through my meager efforts, society was able to gain a deeper insight on North Korea. Nothing would make me happier than if the outcome of my numerous efforts to educate society could contribute to the process of unification. On that evening, I once again vowed to devote my life to researching and educating people about North Korea and unification with the same fervor that I had had years before.

My New Task as the Minister of Unification

With the new millennium on the horizon, I was once again on my quest. Then, toward the end of 1999, I was appointed as the Minister of Unification by the South Korean government. I felt more apprehensive than joyful. I clearly understood the immense responsibility this position entailed. Just as the dawn of a new millennium brings new light, it seemed imperative that I bring new vision to our approach toward the unification issue. Here was a chance for me to muster my thirty years of research and experience to create a new reality. Nevertheless, I was also aware of the clear differences between what research might suggest and what real life will ultimately allow.

From my past experiences, it was vital to bring together a national consensus before any practical contribution toward unification could take place. Therefore, I believed that for the time being, it was necessary to turn our attention to issues that were relatively easier to handle than the political aspects of inter-Korean relations, and so my primary focus was on economic, cultural, and social exchanges between the separated nations.



Patience is a virtue when dealing with North Korea. Unification will take place when, and only when, both sides have reached a consensus on the concept of unification, as this is not a one-way project. If North Korea is not ready, we must learn to respect and embrace its ideas while continuously engaging in activities for coexistence. This was—and still is—the notion that guided me while I served as Minister of Unification. The foundation for unification must be built on a rock, for unification is not something into which we can rush.

I have spent thirty years—nearly half of my life—researching the issue of North Korea and unification. It has been a journey about more than just the research itself; it has been about memories shared with friends from home and abroad, juniors and seniors, acquaintances, colleagues, alumni, professors, and so many more who have assisted me in my quest—so many names that I do not even know with whom to begin my acknowledgements if I were to write such a list. But I would like to express my genuine gratitude and respect to everyone who has shared my sorrow and joy during

these past thirty years. With their support and insight that held me firmly and made me serve well, I earnestly hope to make the most of my abilities to achieve what I set out to do.

In closing, I would like to say that throughout most of my life, I have looked for guidance from nature. One of my favorite proverbs is this: “The best is like water.” What does that mean? Water is good. It does not flow backward. It humbles itself by flowing from upstream to downstream. It does not force itself to go against the flow, but rather gains wisdom and patience by taking the longer route when it must. It has no voice but embraces all forms of life. It appears to be soft and weak, but eventually breaks rocks and channels through them, making us realize its strength and determination. This suggests how an individual can live a virtuous life. Perhaps within this proverb we can also discover how to approach North Korea and Korean unification.