

## Korean Reunification - would it weaken or superpower the south?

Identical twins they're not. The two halves of Korea - a rabbit-shaped, mountainous peninsula jutting into the Yellow Sea - are wildly dissimilar. The North is an impoverished, tyrannized, height-and-economy stunted state, bizarrely cloistered with secret tunnels, rogue nuclear missiles and a recent "boy-king." The South is a workaholic, studious, sleep-deprived builder of huge ships, skyscrapers, Samsung, Hyundai, globe-leading innovations, and direct democracy.

For sixty years these contrary siblings have been separated, embarking on opposing paths in 1953 after a crippling civil war that killed over 3 million. The communist North meandered off into misanthropy, malnourishment and militarism, while the capitalistic South steadfastly toiled its way out of pauperdom into prosperity. Today the South has double the famished North's population, twenty times the per capita income (\$20,759 vs. \$1,074), plus it's citizens live a decade longer and grow four inches taller.

Rumors are always rife of reunification, even when the two sides are slaying each other - which is incessant; fifty SK's were killed in 2010 attacks by Pyongyang. Despite this, consolidation chat is heating up due to the demise in November of the Northern dictator, Kim Jong Il, and the accession of his baby-faced son (Kim Jong-un). Many skeptics believe a merger would cripple South Korea's economy - one estimate suggests \$2.4 trillion is needed, to rebuild the North's abysmal infrastructure, and to subsidize NK refugees that could stream south seeking sustenance, and dental care for their long-rotting teeth.

Optimists disagree, though, and I'm in their camp. (So are the Germans: last May, a 14-member contingent of the reunited European nation journeyed to Seoul to encourage the bisected East Asian nation back towards togetherness.) I believe reunification would eventually make the South stronger; below I have categorized nine arenas in which a unified Korea earns, or maintains, a place among world leaders.

**Military Might** - Do you regard Korea as a frail protuberance, shuddering between giant China and imposing Japan? Think again. If you combine the active forces of NK + SK you get the second-largest army in the world, almost 2 million soldiers (North Korea has 1.2 million military personnel, the South has 700,000.) Globalfirepower.com ranks SK #7 in the world in military might, NK #22. Combined, they also possess a formidable swarm of airplanes, submarines, artillery, and of course, NK's nuclear weapons. One tough Tiger!

**Massive Mineral Wealth** - Credit Suisse estimates that reunification would cost \$1.5 trillion, and Stanford Fellow Peter M. Beck guesses an alarmist **\$2-\$5 trillion**. Question: who's got that kind of cash? Answer: North Korean mines. More than 200 different minerals are sequestered in the Hermit Kingdom's caves, with the majority trapped by flooding and NK's appalling infrastructure. Billions of tons of magnesite, tungsten, coal, iron, gold, zinc, copper, limestone, molybdenite, grapheme, nickel, uranium, phosphate, silver, mercury, sulfur, limestone, copper, manganese... worth an estimated **\$6-\$7 trillion**, according to Bloomberg Businessweek. Reunification - utilizing SK's mining technology - could be entirely paid for by these mother lodes, with change left over.

**Robot Future** - South Korea is programming itself to become Cyborg Central and I wouldn't wager a won against them. Currently ranked 4th in the world, the government is investing heavily to be world leader by 2018. Here's a sextet of current robo-projects: 1) The invention of Mahru-Z (a blue "boy") and Mahru-M (pink & female) — household helpers touted as the world's most advanced 'bots in mimicry of human movement. 2) The construction of "Robot Land" — a theme park that opens in 2013, with 340 robots, including 364-foot tall Robot Taekwon U, and an aquarium with robot-fish. 3) The development of English-teaching robots to replace up to 30,000 human instructors at schools and language institutes. Many are **telepresence** 'bots, controlled by teachers in The Philippines. 4) The government intends to get a service robot into every home by 2020; one might be "Sil-bot," a companion for the elderly who plays games and maintains simple chitchat. 5) The DMZ has an "Intelligence Surveillance and Guard Robot" that detects and interrogates intruders, sounds alarms, and fires a Daewoo K-3 machine gun. 6) SK recently installed "prison guard robots" that are described as a "humane and friendly... helpers."

**Hardworking Economy** - In 1960, SK was a starveling with a per capita annual income of **\$80**. Since then, "The Miracle on the Han River" has boasted the world's most explosive economy: 8.7% annual growth from 1960-1990 transformed it from agricultural hick into techno-metro sophisticate. SK is #1 in digital technology, #1 in shipbuilding, it constructed the world's tallest building (Burj Khalifa in Dubai), the largest shopping center (Shiseigae Centrum City), the biggest boat (cruise ship "MS Allure of the Seas"), it houses Samsung, LG Electronics, Hyundai-Kia, Cyworld, POSCO, etc. How'd SK do it? Relentless education (high-schoolers regularly sleep **only 4 hours per night**), long work hours (**2,390** hours per person annually, 34% more than Americans) and brave creativity — they own the 3rd largest number of patents and in 2010 they were selected the **"Most Innovative Country"** according to Global Innovation Index. Although North Korea is one of the globe's poorest nations, it's citizens are educated and motivated enough to contribute cheap labor to the workforce. Goldman-Sachs believes a unified Korean economy could rival Japan's by mid-century.

**Direct E-Democracy** - When North Korea returns like a wayward brother, it's long-subjugated population will be startled by the non-hierarchical, digital south. As the "most wired nation," South Korea is 15 years ahead of the USA in broadband speed with 95% of its households online. Connectivity is aided by cramped population density in a tiny land — imagine 50 million people in Kentucky. South Korea dwells in a futuristic web frenzy with obsessive chat-room flaming, gambling, porn, games, avatar identity and social networking. The political plus: a vigorous "digital populism" instigated by bloggers and citizen reporters. Online residents of SK have overwhelmed corporate media, destroyed celebrity reputations and organized violent massive street protests at blazing speed. Politicians are now attentive. South Korea was voted **"Best E-Government Nation"** in a 2010 United Nations survey and popular opinion is now carefully consulted via government email, online polls and cyber forums. Jaws will drop in the North, then they'll start arguing, like their kin.

**Education & IQ Edge** - Serious schooling is credited as the main ingredient in South Korea's leap from rags-to-riches. SKs between 25-34 years old are more likely to have an upper secondary education (97%) than anyone else in the world, their education system is ranked in the global Top Five, and the little over-achiever was recently selected **best in the world in "digital literacy."** In 2005, more South Koreans were accepted into Harvard and Yale than Chinese or Indians, even though those nationalities outnumber them 22-1. South Korea also boasts the highest IQ individual on the planet, with Kim Ung-Yong (IQ 210) proficiently reading Korean, Japanese, German and English when he was three years old. The North is also a studious zone, with 99% literacy and continued education is governmentally encouraged for all ages.

**Green Goals** - SK President Lee Myung-bak — a keynote speaker at the 2009 Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen — promoted an ambitious 20-year "low carbon, green growth" plan to vault his nation into

world eco-leadership. His goal was supported by his constituency - a poll estimated 53% of South Koreans view ecology as more important than economic growth. Today there are mind-boggling eco-urban designs swarming out of Seoul: "farmpartments" for city vegetables, 50-floor towers constructed of geo-textiles and photovoltaic glass ([Seoul Commune 2026](#)), and giant greenhouse eco-domes (Ecorium Project nature reserve). Across the nation, organic produce is available everywhere, solar panels are sprouting on rooftops, anti-smoking campaigns are getting butts off the street. President Lee (surnames are first in Korean) was launched into office after serving as the wildly popular mayor of Seoul, where he restored the Cheonggyecheon stream that was buried under concrete in the 1970's. He also established an admired urban park, the "Seoul Forest." North Korea is undoubtedly nastier: data of its eco-condition is secret, but the skyline of its larger cities is obviously blighted.

**Cyber Warriors** - Cyberwar is the "warfare of the future... cyber attacks have the potential to damage our way of life as devastatingly as a nuclear weapon," claims former director of US National Intelligence Michael McConnell. North Korea is prepared for this combat. Defectors to the South claim there are [30,000 NK cyberwarriors](#), perhaps launching up to 15,000 attacks per day, primarily at its estranged twin and the USA. On April 12, 2011, the North's Reconnaissance General Bureau cyberattacked South Korea's Nonghyup Bank, collapsing the institution's computer systems, stranding [30 million customers](#) without access to their accounts. North Korean hackers are as skilled as the American CIA, claims Byun Jae-jung, researcher at South Korea's Agency for Defense Development. (The USA is ranked best in the world by McConnell.) To counter NK viral intrusion, SK has assembled its own immense squad of computer specialists. Compelled by fear of each other, North and South Korea are developing cyber battle-skills superior to other nations, which will merge if they're ever reunified.

**Seductive K-Culture** - Intense interest in South Korean socio-cultural products — dubbed "hallyu" (craze for all things Korean) or "Korean fever" or "Korean wave" — is a tsunami that's engulfing the world. A 23-year-old Cambodian man interviewed by *The Economist* (1/25/10) dismissed American and Japanese cultures as "insipid relics" that have been conquered by the lure of hallyu. South Korean soap operas, video games, K-pop, fashion, and movie stars are obsessions throughout Asia, and in distant locales such as Chile, Hungary, Mexico, Norway, and Argentina. SK movie stars are mobbed at airports and chased by women on scooters; SK black market DVDs are sold in North Korea for ten times the price of American DVDs, South Korea sells ten times as many cultural products to China as vice-versa, and its cultural import sales are expanding at 10-15% per year. Why are youth infected with Korean fever? Is it the portrayal of a techie-mod lifestyle? Is it the fiery temperament and desirability of its stars? (Washington Post reporter described SK male actors as "sensitive but totally ripped.") Is any of this economically or politically important? Yes and yes. Seoul's cultural exports double or triple every three years, and their trend-setting success sells other SK products, everything from shampoo to sweaters. Hallyu also promotes tourism, and former President Roo Moo-hyun once predicted that "hallyu will reunite the peninsula." Still have doubts? Check out [Girls' Generation](#) songs "Gee" and "Oh!" and "Run Devil Run" for a sugar-pop fix.

**Conclusion** - I'm a kimchi fan and my cell phone is a Samsung Galaxy. In the future I might buy an Avante, I might live in either a village-vessel or a green sky-tower community, both designed and built by Koreans. At night, while my Korean robots clean house and cook dinner, I might relax in Korean pajamas watching Korean cinema on my giant plasma Korean screen. My vocabulary might be sprinkled with Koreans words that describe my new culture. Life is accelerating, and Koreans often seem like they're moving faster than anyone else. Sixty years ago starving South Koreans ate their pets and the trees in the mountains; the North maintains this desperate diet today. Koreans are Survivors... Reunification? An insurmountable problem? 조금도 ...아니다, 전혀...이 아니다

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