

Recognition of Estranged Other :

A Theoretical Reflection on Politics of Identity and Systems
Integration in Inter-Korean Relations

Gibung Kwon

(Kyung Hee University)

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· **Keywords** : North-South Korea relations, estrangement, identity politics,
system integration

[ABSTRACT]

The recent resurgence of recognition in the context of identity politics and multiculturalism deserves a careful theoretical examination. While it is thought that it has relevance to those areas of research that deal with the issues of integrating and embracing minorities and foreigners, it is argued that the dialectic of estrangement and recognition is even applicable to the case of estranged others like divided nations. When properly conceptualized in terms of social systems, it throws an important theoretical light on the practical issues lying ahead when the divided nations are integrated. From the theoretical perspective of systems integration and identity politics, this article argues that in order to overcome estrangement without resorting to violence and war, the estranged

countries must first acknowledge the existence of the other and learn to live side-by-side. They must engage in common works that could induce their dialogue and interactions. Then both countries should strive to find common rules to abide by. Under the same rules of existence, they should allow each to recognize and respect the other so that the unique identity of each is not obliterated or merged with the other. These steps of genuine recognition between countries should happen not just at the level of political entities, but at all levels from individuals to associational activities and to economic and social interactions. Only then can two estranged others be united into one and form a single identity, while each maintains the rights to choose its own form of existence.

I . Introduction

How we recognize others determines the relationship we form with them—either as friend, enemy, comrade, or otherwise. Likewise, the relationship a country has with neighbors is influenced by the identities that they have reciprocally bestowed upon themselves. The identity that each one holds about the other may or may not be identical. What each wants from the other may or may not be what the other is willing to bestow. Despite a possibility of discrepancy in the process of identity, each country is eventually to acquire a political identity that it has to live by whether it likes it or not. Otherwise, the *raison d'être* of being a country is not procured by failing to secure what is necessary to maintain itself. That is, the political system cannot maintain its own boundary, hence separating itself from others.

With an internationally recognizable identity, a country tends to maintain itself unless it is forced to give up its political identity, hence making it necessary to negotiate a new identity that suits to a new circumstance. Of

those circumstances, what interests most theorists of identity politics and inter-Korean relations specialists in particular would be that of estranged ones: that is, how and in what circumstances two countries in separate existence come together again to form a common identity that unites them in self-consciousness and practice. What are the necessary conditions for estranged countries to get close to each other and to form a unified identity?¹⁾

To rephrase it in systems theory terminology, it amounts to asking what the conditions of integration between two political systems would be. Political systems constitute themselves as a self-referential system as long as they can separate themselves from others, in geography, culture, and political institutions. Being autonomous, they construct around their core values and/or institutions either “imagined” or material boundaries and take on a political identity differentiating one from the others.²⁾ Once the boundaries and identities are settled by time and institutional practices, the political systems tend to sustain themselves, unless they are destabilized en masse by internal crises or external threats. System integration is unlikely to happen between autonomous political systems.

Given the equilibrating tendency inherent in self-referential political systems, the question of system integration (or identity transformation) is

1) These kinds of identity issues can be broached from many different schools of thought and theory, i.e., functionalism, neo-institutionalism, and neo-realism, etc. In the contemporary discourse on identity politics and recognition, it is typically explained in either the right-based or rule-based citizenship model or systemic functional theory in which agents acquire their individual identity around the roles and functions they perform in a system, given the fact that the interpersonal recognition based upon sentiments is limited to the close ones (i.e., friends, lovers, or kin members). The first is what political scientists typically find it to be the case in nation-states, while the second is what sociologists or market-oriented liberals postulate it to be the case in modern society. For the contemporary debate on recognition and identity politics, see Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003); Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

2) See Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. and Dirk Baecker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

typically taken to be that of examining and investigating the extraneous factors influencing the homeostasis of autonomous political systems. In consequence, the first issue is often regarded only as a derivative one from the latter, which does not need to be addressed in itself. Once the extraneous factors are identified and their destabilizing effects are gauged, it is believed, there would be no other task left for further investigation to explain the system integration—either a political system will constitute itself anew from inside or a new one can be imposed at will by a foreign force without much difficulty.

The issue of system integration, however, cannot be totally reduced to that of sudden boundary collapse or internal implosion or external imposition. It should be addressed from the perspective of “identity transformation” (or the process of identity change), regardless if it is induced by internal or external causes. That is because, theoretically speaking, the extraneous factors alone would not destabilize and cause a systemic transformation unless they reach the point at which the generalized expectations of and interactions between constituent members are out of sync with the existing institutions and/or institutionally derived expectations. If they do so, it is because they have affected the self-referential system by fundamentally challenging the roles, rules and norms of actors that provide the guidelines for their interactions. As a result, the normative expectations about oneself and others (i.e., the identities of constituent members) are also fundamentally challenged and hence in the process of change.

We could say, therefore: How the identity transformation process is structured and how it is worked eventually out among social actors determines what kind of self-referential system is constituted anew in its place. Given the fact that any social system is in the end what the members of a society make of themselves out of their own norm (or rule)-driven actions and interactions and that the norms (or rules) of society constrain and enable the actors’ actions by empowering and embodying them with positions and roles by the social relations, all fundamental systems change, including system integration among estranged ones, is directly and

fundamentally related to (and should be approached from) the process of constituent members' identity transformation if it is to be systemically analyzed and explained.

Despite the efforts to develop theories for unification or integration relevant to inter-Korean relations, the system integration and identity transformation between the two Koreas still remains as theoretical enigma for the discipline because the prevalent approaches to it are not well geared to accommodate the subjective dimension involved in politics of identity and recognition. In addition, they tend to be synchronistic and only single subsystem oriented theories either of political or economic orientation. Even when pure political or economic motivations for a new identity negotiation are present, it is seldom fully explained why the partners in this action would have to share a common identity, given the fact that the rest of the world is happy as they are on their own. Unless the subjective dimension involved in identity politics is accounted for, no theory of integration or identity politics is complete. Rather an important aspect of identity politics is left unanswered. This theoretical issue becomes of critical importance particularly for the "estranged" countries, like the two Koreas. That is because they have to overcome not just physical or material remoteness but psychological animosity between them if they ever come to negotiate for a new common identity.

When we talk of the issue of estrangement and identity transformation, therefore, we cannot help but go back to the original thinkers who formulated the relevant theoretical concepts of estrangement and alienation in social transformations of the self: i.e., Marx and Hegel.³⁾ For Hegel, estrangement is the condition arising when the individual is confronted by an independent, hostile power which has an objective life of its own, when the individual has no awareness of this power actually being the result of its own alienation, and when it lacks any control over this power.⁴⁾ For

3) There is a subtext to the author's resuscitating Marx and Hegel in this context. He purports to couch this theoretical dialogue in the terms that the other interlocutor can readily understand.

4) Estrangement is discussed for the first time in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the

Marx, in contrast, estrangement and alienation have to do primarily with human laboring processes and ensuing external relationship between laborer and products.⁵⁾ Based upon an anthropological (or existential) observation of human beings in production, Marx has developed the well-known theory of social transformation, that is, historical materialism or dialectic of estrangement.

Both are of particular relevance in identity politics and system integration because they developed the concept of estrangement not only to diagnose individual psychological make-ups and social relations in society, but also to explain external relationships between groups of people including classes and political entities. By carefully reinterpreting Marxian materialism and Hegelian dialectic of recognition, this article attempts to provide an analytical framework for overcoming intersocietal estrangement. It also intends to throw a useful theoretical light on the inter-Korean identity politics and systems integration issues plaguing the current inter-Korean relations.

II . Intersocietal Estrangement in Marxian Historical Materialism

According to Marx, man is said to be separated from his own products—a break between the individual and the material world. He is also said to be separated from his fellow men. In each instance, a relation that distinguishes the human species has disappeared and its constituent elements have been reorganized to appear as something else. Thus Marx

section entitled “Legal Status.” This corresponds to Hegel’s discussion of Imperial Rome. Hegel’s concept of ‘estrangement’ is further developed in “Spirit in Self-Estrangement.” It is overcome when the spirit reaches “Revealed Religion” and “Absolute Knowledge.” G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

5) For a detailed discussion of Marx’s estrangement, see Isidor Wallimann, *Estrangement: Marx’s Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

states, “[t]he externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, and external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien.”⁶⁾ He also argues, “[a]n immediate consequence of man’s estrangement from the product of his labour, his life activity, his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man. What is true of man’s relationship to his labour, to the product of his labour, and to himself, is also true of this relationship to other men, and to the labour and the object of the labour of other men.”⁷⁾ In consequence, he declares: “[t]he man estranged from himself is also the thinker estranged from his essence—that is, from the natural and human essence. His thoughts are therefore fixed mental shapes or ghosts dwelling outside nature and man.” (1844 *Manuscripts*, 168)⁸⁾ For Marx, thus, alienation or estrangement is a natural outcome and consequence of human labor or human existence, from which all other relations follow, including private property and capitalist relations. In regard to this historical materialism, it is said, two founding fathers of Marxism (Marx and Engels) were “standing on the head of Hegel.”⁹⁾

However, his anthropology of human condition in the *Grundrisse* allows us a different understanding of historical materialism.¹⁰⁾ As Justin Rosenberg states, the central claim of historical materialism is “not what it

6) See <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labor.htm>> (searched date: 14 June 2010), p. 3.

7) *Ibid.*

8) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

9) Karl Marx, “Afterward to the Second German Edition” (1873), in Robert C. Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1972), pp. 197-8. In this regard, Dallmayr notes that what is turned around in Marx’s approach is not so much metaphysics itself as rather the role of “man” in the historico-dialectical process. Marx relocates or redefines, following the method of transformative criticism, the central motor of historical development and self-actualization to man, who is regarded basically as a “human natural being.” Fred R. Dallmayr, *G. W. F. Hegel: Modernity and Politics* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), pp. 192-200.

10) Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (NY: Random House, 1973).

is often taken to be, even by many Marxists, namely that economic relations determine political relations.” Rather, “it is the centrality of those relations which organize material production to wider institutional reproduction of social orders.”¹¹⁾ It leaves it an open empirical question what those relations are in any given society. In addition, Marx is quite explicit in emphasizing the role of coercion in bringing societies together to form a more encompassing one.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx distinguished three stages of social development: a primitive stage in which humans were governed by “relations of personal dependence”; a succeeding phase in which they were associated in “relations of personal independence”; and a final condition, yet to be realized, in which whole species would attain the condition of “free individuality” or “socialized humanity.”¹²⁾ In the primitive society individuals belonged to a whole into which they were completely immersed, hence dependent on the whole not only for their subsistence but also for their identity. The whole to which Marx referred (the family, clan, tribe, etc.) acquires its particular “shape” and “identity” in a historic process of intermixture and antithesis with others and nature.¹³⁾ Their relations to nature and to other communities as an alien and mysterious force (estrangement) were the two phenomena imprinted on the structure of the earliest societies. The connection between the two aspects of their alienation was displayed most vividly in the role which war played in the struggle to reproduce material life.¹⁴⁾

What is interesting in the primitive society is the influence that intersocietal estrangement has on the structure of society. This aspect of Marx’s historical

11) Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 53.

12) Marx (1973), p. 158.

13) *Ibid.*, p. 490.

14) Referring to communes, Marx notes: “The only barrier which the community can encounter in relation to the natural conditions of production—the earth—as to its own property ... is another community, which already claims it as its own inorganic body. Warfare is therefore one of the earliest occupations of each of these naturally arisen communities, both for the defense of their property and for obtaining new property ...” *Ibid.*, p. 491.

materialism, as Linklater notes, resembles the neorealist image of international relations, according to which the international structure of anarchy imposes the imperative of survival on the state as its *raison d'être*.¹⁵⁾ When carefully examined, however, Marx's communal estrangement amounts to an "interaction system" composed of communes.¹⁶⁾ The primitive communal system is composed of communes, whose identities are constituted around "blood-lines," interacting with each other through the medium of violence (war). Understood as such, Marx's historical materialism is no other than a theory of system transformation from communal system through exchange system to socialist system which is induced by the changes of social mediums of interaction. That is, it is a diachronic theory explaining how the community identity is replaced by individual identities. This reconceptualization is quite important in interpreting Marx's historical materialism. It becomes evident that Marx already presupposes in his conception of the commune the identities of communes constituted by "blood" as given. Without it, his category of estrangement becomes vacuous. If the category of "estrangement" is to be meaningful, there have to be fully constituted identities separating each other. Each commune has to know that it is different from others.

Marx's assumption that the identity was constructed around familial ties is a quite plausible one supported by anthropological evidence. But his next following assertion is not quite as self-evident as the first seems to be. The interactions among communes of separate identities, according to Marx, were of a violent nature. That is, violence (war) was the medium of their interactions. This second observation, however, does not follow from the first with logical necessity. The separate entities would certainly have some sort of contacts with each other through a means of interactions (e.g.,

15) Andrew Linklater, "Marxism," in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1996), pp. 119-43.

16) Interaction system is the one that emerges when present individuals perceive one another (including the perception of mutual perception) as the object of his/her action, in that each one needs to adjust (or adapt) his/her behavior in consideration of the other's response. See, Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, trans. Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 71-2.

goods, violence, or signs) as long as they are in close proximity. Nothing necessitates that their interactions are of a violent-nature, however. Their interactions could be mediated by non-violent modes of contact (i.e., exchange of goods, tribute, or simple neglect), especially considering the fact that the community identity formation principle, “blood-line,” does not have an inherent fixed outer-boundary. Depending on the circumstances, communes could be formed around quite extended familial ties connecting several of them. The category of “estrangement” itself, therefore, has to be supplemented by another one that can justify Marx’s observation of the violent prehistory.

That category may be derived from Marx’s anthropological observation of the human condition, as Eric Wolf succinctly presents: “the human species is an outgrowth of natural processes; at the same time, the species is naturally social.”¹⁷⁾ That is to say, humans subsist materially in and through their interaction with nature; and this interaction is carried on characteristically in groups made up of individuals connected to each other. These two facts are linked insofar as the interaction with nature is an organized activity.¹⁸⁾ What the Marxian concept of “labor” does in this regard is to express the existential fact “analytically.”¹⁹⁾ Wolf calls it the strategic relationship, partly because the lines connecting the interaction of the society with the material world, on the one hand, and the structured interaction of individuals which comprises the society, on the other hand, all cross here.²⁰⁾ It is here that conflict over the appropriation of surplus

17) Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), p. 73.

18) *Ibid.*, pp. 73-77.

19) Marx is not just descriptive of human laboring condition. He transforms it into a substantive claim about how to understand and explain historical societies. He states: “The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labor is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers to ruled ... It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers ... which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state.” Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), vol. 1, p. 290.

20) See, Rosenberg (1994), pp. 50-54.

labor happens routinely, hence slave rebellion, peasant revolt, and general strike, etc.

What is germane to our discussion, however, are not the substantive theoretical claims but his anthropological observation. When we accept Marx's observation that the fundamental, original human condition is that of organized social activities against nature, it makes sense that inter-communal life is violence-ridden. If we are allowed to assume that possessiveness of proprietary kind is the primary motive of individual collectivities it is likely that the possessive competition over scarce resources could lead to a violent struggle. On a closer inspection, however, this reduction of human motives to a single motive of possession is problematic. His view of communal anarchy is untenable unless there is further evidence pointing to the necessity of violence in communal interactions. Human beings have other motives than the possessive one involved in the activities against nature, like self-fulfillment, aggrandizement, vanity, etc. Furthermore, it does not follow from the premise of possessive motive that the possessive struggle always takes a violent form because property rights over a land, for instance, do not have to be an "exclusive" one. If violence is still the outcome despite the possibilities of alternative property relationships between communes (i.e., communal ownership, use right, etc.), there must be some other causes that account for the violence.

Logically speaking, war will be the dominant mode of interaction among collectivities (communes) only if other possible negotiated arrangements over the resources (e.g., collective ownership) are not at hand to resolve a possessive conflict; or if an exclusive property right is already established; or if ingrained animosity (which is not rooted in the possessive struggle) exists between different communes. In the first case, violence between communes will be an "historical contingency." As violence becomes a "contingent" outcome of the social labor of communes, Marx's concept of "labor" fails to supplement that of "estrangement" to necessitate the violence between communes. If the second is the case, Marx's communal prehistory is already implicated in a "social system" where exclusive

property rights are its defining structure. Contrary to Marx's arguments, then the communal society is no different from the later capitalist one in its structures that define the nature of the systems except the types of actors. If the third, it means that Marx has in mind another mechanism of identity formation of communes, at least in conjunction with the one based on "familial ties."

Marx did not disclose clearly why violence had to be a necessary outcome of communal interactions. Nonetheless, according to Marxian theory, the communal life could not be sustained indefinitely and had to be transformed into another kind of social system. Marx identified two possible sources for the dissolution of the early dependent societies: conquest and exchange relations. As these early societies were dissolved by conquest (an outcome of possessive struggle), a more encompassing social system emerged. The rise of empire, for Marx, was a major reason for the development of unequal yet more inclusive social formations, which destroyed the symbolic unity of exclusive tribal community. Conquest as the main agent of their dissolution had various effects upon the "original forms" of community. Either the conquering people subjugated the conquered under its own mode of production, left the old mode intact and contented itself with a tribute, or a reciprocal interaction took place whereby something new, a synthesis, arose.²¹⁾

The development of exchange relations first appeared "in the connection of the different communities with one another, not in the relations between the different members of a single community."²²⁾ Initially, exchange had

21) Marx (1973), p. 97. What is noteworthy in Marx's observation of "conquest" as a path of communal dissolution is the fact that Marx did not fully develop it to the extent Hegel did. As noted, Marx hinted at a possible synthesis arising from the transformation of horizontal estrangement into a hierarchical one. He did not take the insight further to probe the possibility that the hierarchical estrangement, mediated by authoritative relations, could lay the ground for another path of emancipation. As a result, the next historical transformation was limited to the mediation by exchange relations, which was Marx's second cause of the dissolution of the earliest forms of human society.

22) *Ibid.*, p. 103.

“not so much taken a grip on the life of entire communities as, rather, inserted itself between” them.²³⁾ Although the exchange of superfluous products began as an accessory to production and only slightly modified the organization of domestic production, it did not maintain its relative indifference in respect to the inner construction of production for long.²⁴⁾ When exchange relations became entrenched within these societies their members became incorporated within an ever-expanding and deepening social division of labor. As a result, not only was the mode of production altered thereby, but also all the economic relations that corresponded to it were dissolved. As the money economy emerged, thus Marx writes, “the ties of personal dependence, of distinctions of blood, education, etc. are in fact exploded, ripped up ... and individuals seem independent ... free to collide with one another and to engage in exchange within this freedom.”²⁵⁾ Marx describes these relations of personal independence as “the second great form” of social life in which “a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time.”²⁶⁾

What interests us most here in Marx’s second great form of social life is the individuation of individuals from the traditional communal identities which is induced by the commodification of labor, which is in turn made possible by the introduction of money as the universal medium of interactions (the formation of a money-community). If we reconstruct this second form of social life in terms of systems theory, we can see the gist of Marx’s arguments: if social interactions are standardized around a universal medium, other possible actor identities except that of labor lose meaning or become irrelevant, hence a determinate identity. Then, an organization system²⁷⁾ is formed at the society around the action motives

23) *Ibid.*, p. 159.

24) *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

25) *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

26) *Ibid.*, p. 158.

27) Distinctive features of this type of social system derive from the fact that membership is linked to specific conditions that are imposed on them by the organization (e.g., economic corporations). In this regard, Luhmann states: “The organization will ... not

of money-making for the capitalist and subsistence for the proletariat (two are not differently expressed in the capitalist society because money is the only available medium of both); its boundary is also determined around the places where the buying-selling activities reach (e.g., world-markets).

Its structure also takes on a particular characteristic in the system: that is, a hierarchical one wherein purchasing power determines the position of the parties in contract. Those who own the purchasing power contract out the labor time of laborers leaving their reproduction at their own means. The laborers who do not have any other means but their own labor to support the reproduction fall under the complete control of the owners of production. The hierarchical relationship in the private economic realm is then naturally transposed onto the political realm, resulting in a situation where formal equality among individuals is nullified in reality by the *de facto* control of the capitalist over the labor. In this total hierarchical relationship, it becomes obvious for the labor that they have fallen into the same dependent and alienated relation as in other previous hierarchical relationships.

When interpreted as an “organization system” theory of the capitalist society, Marx’s historical materialism nicely captures the characteristic underlying logic behind the capitalist social formations. However, it is also evident that the reduction of bourgeoisie society in totality into an “organization system” requires a radical abstraction of “labor,” which is only possible if money becomes the only universal medium of social interactions. Even if we accept Marx’s premises, there is no way to be deterministic about the relationship between the relations of production and other realms (or social relations in totality) as Marx did. The reason has to do with the structural requirement of organization system: that is, the homogeneity of actor identities. Is it possible to achieve the homogeneity

be dependent on the creation of spontaneous personal motives or moral commitment and consensus for every action required. Motives are ‘generalized’ through membership: soldiers march, secretaries type, professors publish, and political leaders govern—whether it happens, in this situation, to please them or not.” Luhmann (1982), p. 75.

in the essentially open system of capitalist society where the liberal principle of the separation of private and public realms is still intact? Subjects may receive a particular signal from the signifier (money), thereby form a particular relation with it (commodity relation). However, there is no necessity that the relation is perceived and constituted uniformly by the subjects as that of laborer as Marx argued it should be. Herein lies an “over-determination” between the signifier and the meanings that subjects will get out of it. Depending on the contexts in which they are situated, especially when they carry their own distinctive prior identities, the subjects may draw other meanings (hence other identities) from the signification than that of labor. If the over-determination is to be avoided, there has to be a mechanism that works to constrain and reshape them into a particular type of homogeneous agents.

Marx certainly realized the necessity of a “constraining” category for which he suggested two well-known structures: class structure and political super-structure (or ideology). As these structures were the derivatives of the capital-labor-relations, he failed to provide them an independent ontological category. In his theoretical scheme, therefore, he was unable to incorporate the theoretical possibility that a “social” structure may develop its own abstraction that constrains (or deflects) the capitalist social relations’ formative influences on actor identities. Ontologically speaking, “social” structure comes before actor. Otherwise, actor is not constituted to form a system.

III. Estrangement in the Struggle for Recognition

In his seminal book *Hegel*, Charles Taylor discusses the dialectic of master and slave as an illustration of Hegelian style of argumentation found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.²⁸⁾ His rendition of the dialectic illuminates

28) For the dialectic of master and slave the author relies on Taylor’s interpretation. See Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 148-70.

nicely the richness of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as a fuller rendition of Marx's historical materialism. A careful reading of the dialectic points to a possible way to correct the shortcomings of Marx's historical materialism.

According to Hegel's exposition in the *Phenomenology*, men at an undeveloped stage of history simply attempt to wrest recognition from another without reciprocating. As they are self-centered parochial beings giving no recognition of others, human beings strive to achieve mere external confirmation by imposing their force against others. Naturally the attempted imposition leads to an armed struggle. The upshot of the resulting master-slave relation is the mediated nature between the two parties. As the slave saves his life by giving up his individuality, its relationship with the master is no longer that of equality, but that of property and material inter-mediation—i.e., Hegelian estrangement and alienation. All that the slave can do with his body is to make and prepare things for the master's consumption. For the master, therefore, the slave is only an item of the things that surround the master for use. Or the slave is no other than a tool that helps his consumption. In this situation, the master is related to the slave in no other ways than through the material reality (consumable goods). From the inhumane subjugated relationship slowly takes place a reversal of fortune. In this dialectic, we can discern Hegel's original contribution to the overcoming of estrangement.

What makes the realization possible and historically necessary is Hegel's ontology of human being as essentially "embodied" being.²⁹⁾ Hegel's thesis is that by controlling, making, and remaking objects, a person can establish his self as an objective feature of the world and transcend the stage in which it is simply an aspect of his inner and subjective life.³⁰⁾ According to Waldron, the underlying reason for the transformation of subject has to do with the logic of Hegelian dialectic. In the dialectic a being is defined only by contrasting it with something else. "If X cannot be understood without

29) The embodiment of human existence is the foundational premise of the dialectic of recognition. For the phenomenological meaning, see Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 21-25.

30) Jeremy Waldron, *The Right to Private Property* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 355.

reference to non-X, then there is a sense in which non-X, far from having nothing to do with X, is actually essential to X.”³¹⁾ It is also the case with the self-definition of a human being. For instance, to define oneself as a person is, first, to mark off other bearers of rights and duties which one takes oneself to be, but then to realize that one’s place in a network of other persons is itself constitutive of one’s personality, and that one could not be a person except in a world of persons. Likewise, the universal consciousness through mutual recognition is a necessary outcome when the subject seeks its ultimate self-consciousness after achieving external embodiment through work. There is no other way to achieve it except the externalization of the self.

The dialectical necessity of implicating the other in one’s self-identity (or the presence of non-being in being) in the process of achieving universal recognition brings into focus an important question of what the precondition is for its actualization. That is, the teleology of universal consciousness may or may not work out in itself in the history of human development insofar as it is only “potentiality” present in the human being qua embodied being. There is no determinate reason why the dialectical necessity is actualized in the modern era unless the condition for its actualization has already been materialized. Logically speaking, at least, it has to be the case that the external embodiment is generalized enough to the extent that all the subjects are similar in their character and they can recognize each other as such. Otherwise, no condition exists for the generalization of the subject’s material embodiments, hence no universality established. The private property right has played an important role in the development of this general self-understanding, Waldron argues.³²⁾

The presupposition of an independent ontological category is not just the case with the subject’s identity formation. For Hegel, it is also the case with the media of interactions that intermedicate the relationship with material objects and with other subjects at the underdeveloped stages of

31) *Ibid.*, p. 376.

32) *Ibid.*, pp. 376-77.

human consciousness: that is, “work” in the first and “violence” in the second. These are the means through which the subjects confirm their existence. Both of them are certainly derivative categories from the fundamental one of human subjects as being essentially “embodied” socially and materially. Their ontological independence and priority to the subjects is inferred from the fact that the subjects have no other existence except through the media: that is, without them, they are not constituted as subjects in the first place.

If the ontological pre-existence and logical independence both of social structure and medium of interaction are accepted, we can legitimately raise a theoretical question in regards to the dialectic: Is there any necessary reason why social structure and medium of interaction in a social system should always take the forms of what Hegelian dialectic has taken? No determinate reason is found other than historical one in the Hegelian narrative. Theoretically speaking, it is quite possible to expand the Hegelian theoretical framework to other types of relations, as long as the theoretical framework is kept intact. Rather in such other relations is revealed Hegelian dialectic’s richness as a theory of social change and human development.

When understood in an expanded conception of social relations, Hegelian dialectic, in essence, is no other than a diachronic system theory on the development of human consciousness within the universalized social context of material relations, which is most clearly expressed in the contemporary civil society. From the materially mediated relations in civil society, it is quite plausible to infer, as Marx did, that the emergent social relation among the universal consciousness is an exchange relation in which each subject is identified as an owner of properties. Each is linked to the others only through buying and selling activities of “things”; that is, through the medium of the market.

What is crucial in Hegel’s system, which makes it distinctive from Marxian system, is not the material embodiment itself, but universal “consciousness” of the subject, toward the achievement of which the work-induced material embodiment is a helpful intermediate stepping

stone. For Hegel, the human subject as the embodiment of universal consciousness, the Geist, is the ultimate terminal stage of human development. In order to be embodied in the pure consciousness, the subject eventually has to take off the material embodiment.

This idealistic component of Hegelian dialectic opens up a whole range of different possibilities of social relation in the interaction system. For Hegel, the subjectivity of subject does not have to take on a particular material form in order to become universal (i.e., trade goods), as is the case with Marx. Insofar as the discovery of subjectivity is a matter of phenomenological dialectics, it is very likely that universality is derived from any kind of objective embodiments, regardless of whether they are material or social, if they can be recognized as such. Even starting from the same premise of the work-induced material embodiment, it does not necessarily follow that the social relation as a whole degenerates into one particular type of relation (“exchange relation”) before it reaches the condition which is ripe for the emergence of universality in exchange relation, as Marx postulated in the historical materialism.

If we accept the Hegelian position that what is important in the emancipation is the work-induced embodiment, we can infer that the nature of the subject’s embodiment will eventually determine what kind of relation is constructed among the subjects. Again when we take into consideration the possibility that “work” does not have to take only the form of work-*against*-material-objects and the possibility of taking the form of work-*for*-socially-meaningful-objects (conquest, money-making, respect, etc.) or work-*for*-pure-aesthetic-objects (music, painting, writing, etc.), we may say that the subject’s embodiment will be different in nature and character, depending upon the type of work that a subject performs.³³⁾ We can also expect that its entailing social relations will be different by the type of embodiment.³⁴⁾

33) Hegel regards aesthetical works as an important means and embodiment of individual will qua universality. For Hegel’s aesthetics, see Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 211-41.

34) For a detailed exposition of the latent potentialities of social relations in Hegelian

According to Hegelian dialectic, in short, the individual is recognized in various (materially or else) mediated forms. Although recognition can be achieved, at least in logic, either inter-subjectively or through mediation, individuals have been recognized historically by the latter, mostly through material embodiments (i.e., property, work, moral rules, and the state). Hence human motives are crystallized around a particular historical medium of interaction. Whether a person becomes a money-monger or power-seeker depends on how the person is to be recognized by others. The latter has ultimately to do with the socially constructed cognitive medium, which is the phenomenal manifestation of the social structuring process undergone by the society either peacefully (e.g., hegemonic inculcation) or violently (e.g., social revolution). The bourgeoisie class was, for instance, able to gain social recognition only when wealth had become the object of social status taking the place of aristocratic birth.³⁵⁾

IV. Systems Integration and Recognition qua Identity Politics in Inter-Korean Relations

After the post-war division of the Korean peninsula into two separate political systems, the relationship of the two Koreas has gone through several dramatic ups and downs, ranging from actual war (in the 1950s), border skirmishes, and amicable dialogues, to economic exchanges and cultural collaborations. Hence, it is almost next to impossible to define the North-South Korea relations in a few words. It is also hard to find any systematic pattern in the relations except a cyclical repetition of animosity and benign neglect or ignorance and halting dialogue and engagement. Nevertheless, in hindsight and longer term retro-perspective, we cannot

dialectic of recognition, see Gibung Kwon, "Re-conceptualizing Hegelian Master-Slave Dialectic as Diachronic Systems Theory of Inter-societal Relations," *The Korean Journal of International Relations* 46-5 (2006), pp. 7-35.

35) Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

help but notice the fact that the two estranged Koreas have taken steps to come closer to each other, even if haltingly, by discarding the aged bellicose animosity against each other and endeavoring to patch up the differences in political and other systems, for a better and more amicable relationship between the two. They have done so, however, largely avoiding asking (or directly confronting with) the daunting political question: that is, how the two Koreas will come to have a common political identity both at the national level and at the individual level.

The pundits and practitioners have simply assumed that it will be solved away in the future when the two are unified *de facto* by any means, either politically or accidentally. They could do so mainly because the common identity issue is understood as a derivative one from the political or security and economic relations between the two. Or they seem to hope that the old ethnic Korean identity will “do the job” even after the two Koreas have gone through so much in the past and now. How naïve an assumption this is! Upon a little theoretical and historical reflection, we cannot help but puzzle over a naivety that the pundits display on this issue. The fact that the sentiment of nation (or nationalism) is not a political or economic by-product is repeatedly confirmed by the numerous failed attempts to build nation-states in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. *Ethnic* or nationhood in embryo is no guarantee for a unified political identity in nation-state building unless other conditions are met, particularly unless well planned and implemented enculturation initiatives on the part of the state are in existence. Considering the fact that the common historical legacy is becoming ever more remoter and vaguer in the hearts and memory of Koreans, it is all the more unlikely that a common political identity would take shape and root naturally from economic interactions in a limited scope or from a kind of political or military haphazard collapse and eventual absorption of one by the other.

The above discussed Marxian and Hegelian theory of system transformation provides us an alternative analytical framework for the identity politics involved in the estranged two Koreas. It has several practical implications for our discussion at hand. First, since system

integration involves more than anything else a perceptual change embracing estranged others as one of us, it becomes very important in determining the outcome of a new enlarged identity, including ease or difficulty of identity change, how the original conceptual framework of identity is structured in the first place, and what kinds of alternatives are proposed and examined in the process.

If the original identity is structured around narrow exclusionary criteria, then it is unlikely or extremely difficult for the potential partners to arrive at a compromised embracive identity without incurring a forceful conversion process of the part of the weaker or minority, regardless if the system integration is initiated by force or negotiation. The more it is open-ended and inclusive, the easier it will become for the concerned parties to come to an acceptable common identity and hence constitute an integrated system. As multi-vocal and polysemous words allow more variations in meaning interpretation, hence more room for creative adaptation, it is expected that multicultural societies are more likely to accommodate otherness and differences although the level of unity among the enlarged community members could be sacrificed as much.³⁶⁾

Second, since system integration is a process of and an outcome of identity change, it becomes clear that we have to pay more attention to the process of change itself, instead of the symbolic outcome that is represented by and crystallized into a recognizable outcome only after a long gestation process of identity reconstitution has ended. We need to do so particularly if we are to be prognostic about the inherently contingent nature of social transformation, not just being post-mortem and post-hoc. Since we are being of our expectations and actions, the change of identity cannot help but be path-dependent. Therefore, the ideational and material elements for a new identity should be already in place, only waiting to be reconfigured and recombined anew by some vanguards of the emerging new identity (or crusaders of a new age). As much we are keen about bits

36) This may not be necessarily the consequence of multiculturalism if the sentiment of unity could be complemented by increased level of economic and social interactions between the integrated groups on equality.

and pieces of the practices and attempts for innovation at present, therefore, we are better positioned to foresee and prepare for the future outcome. These expectations again make the new identity possible or facilitate its actualization in reality.

Third, as no citizen in modern society can be reduced to a single identity, it perforce involves many dimensions and areas of institutional life if the integration is to be materialized. As one is father, worker, and citizen, etc. all at the same time, any new identity should involve reconstitution of all the relevant roles and positions if it is to be completely functional for a new integrated system. Since political identity is only one component of an integrated new identity, it alone would not be sufficient for a successful system integration even if it is induced by extraneous factors. Unless other components are also in place and complementing each other, no politically instituted integration is ever likely to result in one fully integrated self-referential system. That is because any system integration in modern society is actually that of system(s) integration, each subsystem prescribing its own role expectations. Because of the multiplicity of subsystems in modern self-referential society, it is always open to the systemic changes that arise from the overlapping boundaries and conflicting (or contradictory) role expectations and institutional structures even in a well-functioning and stabilized social system. When one subsystem is destabilized for some reason, it is likely to resonate to other subsystems and, in some circumstances, might end up inducing major systems changes.

What this implies for inter-Korean relations is that in theorizing systems integration for the two Koreas we have to be more attentive to the possible sources of change within and between subsystems that might have positive or negative influences on the integration process of the Koreas. Once identified, they could be utilized, if possible, to facilitate it positively or negatively as a part of systems integration project. Some attempts to connect two economic subsystems in the past or present, for instance, could work as an inducement for overall systems integration. In what circumstances and in what overall systemic mechanisms it could happen, however, needs to be clearly understood and theorized if they are to have

the intended consequences. Otherwise, as we see in the past economic relationships between the two Koreas, one subsystem or single sector oriented initiatives are to be derailed by the countering responses or adverse repercussions from other subsystems. Or worse, their policy might be no different from that of a fisherman dropping his fishnet without knowing the hot spot. In short, the process oriented approach to systems integration should be attentive not only to the processes of identity construction, but also to their interactions among subsystems that facilitate or hinder it.³⁷⁾

V. Conclusion: Overcoming Estrangement for Unity in Diversity

Now, the two Koreas have been in separate existence long enough to justify their political and cultural independence, at least from the systems perspective, although this is hard to accept for the majority of Koreans for sentimental reasons. Aside from the emotional or ideological protestations, we have no choice but to acknowledge the fact that Koreans in the South and the North have been living under different political systems for more than 60 years. The majority of Koreans, except a few of the elderly, do not share politically meaningful meaning structures with each other at present, except the historical roots including common ancestry.

Given this separate existence, what kind of political identity is most suitable for the Koreans in the future? From the previously discussed theoretical implications, what we need to ask ourselves and to ponder concerning the future of the two Koreas' identities and the possibility of their systems integration are as follows: What kind of political identity is

37) Judged from this theoretical perspective, it becomes apparent that the so-called "sunshine" policy was right in postulating or expecting ripple-over effects of one over other subsystems. It, however, is completely ignorant of the first more important aspect of systems integration, identity construction processes. It simply assumes that a new identity will be constructed from the interactions at the level of subsystems.

the most suitable for the two Koreas to share both before and after they form an integrated political and economic system in the future? How is that identity to be constructed through the available means? Unless we prepare for it in advance, the system integration, even if it comes, will result only in chaos and trouble for both Koreas. That is because system integration involving boundary re-drawing is not like the interactions between systems through external contacts. It requires a total restructuring of the system from scratch, starting from the constituents' identity. In order to address these daunting issues, we also have to face up with one of the hardest questions for any Korean to deal with at present: choosing and deciding what we collectively want for and from us as Koreans. That is, what we envision for our common future and what we want to do with each other.

Speaking as a Korean, what we can take as a premise for further discussion and investigation of a unified Korean identity is that we still see each other as being part of our own identity, on the one hand. On the other hand, we want the other to recognize our own existence as deserving of respect. When this desire is reciprocally acknowledged, both Koreas will eventually come to an agreement on the term of "equality in relationships," at least in principle, the meaning of which will still need to be worked out case by case. Assuming that this premise is acceptable at least as an initial and practical one, the first question now can be restated in concrete terms: What kind of political identity allows the two Koreas to find both unity and diversity in unification? It would be more desirable if it is embracive enough to accommodate both political systems equally and fairly while it is flexible enough for the two to find their uniqueness not impaired, or rather guaranteed and respected in this political unity.

What this article suggests is a process oriented approach to the identity-formation by encouraging the partners in action to participate or engage in polysemous symbolic interactions in all walks of life through diverse common media of actions. Since each realm has its own unique structures and medium of interactions, each subsystem (e.g., political system) might have different potential for the identity transformation. Hence each subsystem certainly needs to be individually examined and arranged for

inclusion and expansion. But the examination should be done in the context of other subsystems because each will reciprocally influence the outcomes of others' initiatives. The overall consequences, rather than individual effects in each subsystem, at the systems level, should be gauged and evaluated in longer terms.

What all these mean is that, for instance, it is more desirable for the future system integration to arrange not just economic exchanges initiated by one party in the hope of inducing further engagements in other realms, but to promote multifaceted and multi-layered common cultural causes and to implement in earnest those kinds of politico-social interactions that have resonance in the shared understanding of each other (i.e., identity) like cultural activities. Estrangement, in other words, should be overcome through an aesthetical engagement if (or despite) political estrangement is deep due to past violent confrontations. As the Hegelian dialectic of recognition shows, even when a particular type of recognition predominates at a given time, it does not necessarily foreclose a reversal of fortune by other means on the part of the weak or the strong. Recognition of identity is essentially an open process in which no determinacy is preordained although it is largely circumscribed by symbolic structures of communicative actions between interacting partners.

Therefore, it is desirable for both North and South Korea to take a more practical and step by step approach to the issue of political identity transformation processes between the estranged countries, striving for a "unity in diversity." That is, while both Koreans acknowledge the other's separateness in political, economic and social systems, they both should strive to be united around common cultural activities and more importantly around common tasks and visions. In conclusion, from the theoretical perspective of politics of identity and system integration, we can say that the two Koreas must first acknowledge the existence of the other and then learn to live side-by-side. The next step would be for each to engage the other for common works. With these steps taking place, then, it is necessary to work out common rules to abide by. Even under the same rules of existence, they should be able to recognize and respect each other

so that the uniqueness of each is not obliterated or merged with the other. These steps of genuine recognition should happen not just at the level of political entities, but at all levels from personal psychology to associational activities, to economic and to mutual interactions. Only then can the two estranged others be united into one and form a single identity while each maintains the rights to choose its own form of existence.

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