

Vietnam's Politic of a Divided Nation: From the Reunification to DoiMoi (Renovation) and Its Implication for the Korean Peninsula and North Korea

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The reunification of North and South Vietnam meant for the first time that Vietnam existed as an independent country. Vietnam had the experience of unifying the North-South region and was the first country to succeed in building a model of economic development based on the open and reform policy of “top-down,” while maintaining strong central control from a single-party communist state. Even though North Korea has remained mired in Cold War isolation while Vietnam’s post-war path led toward integration with the globalized economy, the two communist countries share a history of anti-imperialist struggle and ambivalent relations with their common neighbor, China. This paper aims to examine the process of Vietnam’s Reunification and DoiMoi (Renovation) process and identify its implication for the possibility of reunification in the Korean Peninsula. Vietnam’s reform model has been widely touted as the economic path for an impoverished and isolated North Korea to follow. In February 2019, the United States President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong Un tried to make progress on the denuclearization of North Korea and the issue of the Korean Peninsula at the Hanoi Summit. The choice of venue naturally draws attention to the “Vietnam model,” which some analysts have expressed an interest in. Therefore, the paper also discusses what North Korea should learn from Vietnam’s lessons of economic renovation.

Keywords: Reunification, DoiMoi (Renovation), Korean Peninsula, North Korea (DPRK), South Korea (ROK)

I. Introduction: The Process of Vietnam's Reunification

For many years, many thousands of Vietnamese patriots sacrificed themselves for the reunification and independence of Vietnam. Pursuing these aims immediately after the Second World War, first the Viet-Minh, then the anti-Communist nationalists, brought into operation all the means at their disposal, both military and diplomatic. The Geneva Agreements of July 1954 confirmed the independence of Vietnam at the international level. Yet, at the same time, the country's unity, which for several years had no longer constituted a problem, was destroyed.¹

The movement against the United States (U.S.) involvement in the Vietnam War began among peace activists and leftist intellectuals on college campuses after the U.S. began bombing North Vietnam in 1964 and the introduction of combat troops the following year. On April 4, 1967, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech entitled "Beyond Vietnam" in front of 3,000 people at Riverside Church in New York City that shook the U.S. In a powerful address, King proposed that the U.S. stop all bombing of North and South Vietnam, declare a unilateral truce in the hope that it would lead to peace talks, set a date that will remove all foreign troops from Vietnam in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Agreement, and give the National Liberation Front a role in negotiations.² King maintained his antiwar stance and supported peace movements until he was assassinated on April 4, 1968, one year to the day after delivering his speech. As the title suggests, King's speech not only explained why he strongly opposed the war that the U.S. Government conducted in Vietnam, but also moved towards the noble global values of peace and reunification.

1 Philippe Devillers, The Struggle for the Unification of Vietnam, *The China Quarterly*, no. 9 (Jan. - Mar., 1962), pp.2-23.

2 Martin Luther King, "Beyond Vietnam," (speech, New York City, April 4, 1967), <<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>> (date accessed February 08, 2019).

The Initial Step of Fighting against Colonial Rule for National independence and Reunification

French colonization in Vietnam officially lasted from 1887 to 1954, even though the French and other European groups had already arrived and started to influence events in Vietnam as early as 1516.³ After Japan had lost the war and left the country in 1945, the French wanted to take control of Vietnam again. When China became a Communist country in 1949, Communist influence in Vietnam became stronger. In 1945, a nationalist leader, Ho Chi Minh, declared Vietnam an independent country. Soon afterwards, a war between Ho Chi Minh's followers and the French began. It ended after the French had lost an important battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. With this defeat, the country of Vietnam was divided between North and South at the Geneva Conference (1954). The Republic of Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam emerged from the conference differing politically and economically.

Vietnam's struggle against colonialism and for independence was also a struggle for reunification and the integrity of its national sovereignty. The nationalist movements required the strength of solidarity of the entire nation. Ho Chi Minh pointed out, "Our history teaches us this lesson: When our people unite, our country will be independent and free. On the contrary, when people do not unite, they will be invaded by foreign countries."⁴ The August Revolution of 1945 marked a momentous event in Vietnamese history. It formally marked the end of French colonialism in Vietnam and the beginning of Vietnamese national independence. It also marked the end of the Confucianist-oriented monarchy and the beginning of a Communist-oriented democratic republic. The main purpose of the August Revolution was to "regain peace, unification, independence and democracy for our country, for our people."⁵ Moreover, the Revolution

3 Julie Shackford, *Vietnam An Historical Perspective* (Honolulu Hawaii: the Henry Luce Foundation, Inc, 2000), p.181.

4 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, vol. 3 (Hanoi: The National Political Publishing House, 2011), p.256.

5 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, vol. 9 (Hanoi: The National Political Publishing

created a uniform government for the entire country, making it a stepping stone for the resistance wars against French and American invaders. In order to implement and unify the nation's forces to struggle for independence and freedom, the Viet Minh Front was established with delegations and member associations entitled "National Salvation," contributing to boosting the movement and preparing political forces and armed forces as well as building revolutionary bases.

When World War II ended, fascism was annihilated. Taking this chance, the Communist Party and Viet Minh led a general uprising, combining political forces with armed forces, from both rural and urban areas, to disintegrate Japanese military and the puppet state of Imperial Japan, establishing a unified National Government throughout the country before the Allies entered Indochina. Therefore, national independence and national unification fronts were formed and conducted by the Vietnamese people, not by the liberation of the Allies. The task of the Allies was to disarm the Japanese army, not to occupy and divide Vietnam or to establish governments that went against the will and aspirations of the Vietnamese people.

In response to the unreasonable request of the French Government on Vietnamese territory, in the Declaration of Independence on September 2, 1945, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed that "For these reasons, we, the members of the Provisional Government, representing the whole Vietnamese people, declare that from now on we break off all relations of a colonial character with France; we repeal all the international obligation that France has so far subscribed to on behalf of Viet-Nam, and we abolish all the special rights the French has unlawfully acquired in our Fatherland. The whole Vietnamese people, animated by a common purpose, are determined to fight to the bitter end against any attempt by the French colonialists to conquer the country."⁶ In a letter to the President of the U.S., the President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam stated that "When the Japanese were defeated in August 1945, the entire territory of Vietnam was reunified under a Provisional

House, 2011), p.35.

6 Walter L. Hixson, *American Foreign Relations: A New Diplomatic History* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.332.

Government and this Government was immediately put into operation in five months, peace and order were re-established, and a Democratic Republic was established on legal bases and supported the Allied countries in implementing their disarming mission.”⁷ The general election elected the National Assembly I (on January 6, 1946) and fully reflected the will and aspirations of the Vietnamese people to build a united and independent country. The government was officially elected by the Constitutional Assembly (March 2, 1946) as “the true Government of the entire people.” This victory was a historic advance by leaps and bounds regarding the national institution of rule by law and democracy, as a testimony to the creativeness and practicality of Ho Chi Minh’s thought on building a law-governed State of the people, by the people and for the people.

Persistence in the Goal of National Independence and Reunification by Struggling against French Reoccupation

Vietnam’s independence did not last long. French troops came back and reoccupied Cochinchina with the ‘divide and rule’ policy. After taking over Cochinchina, France separated Nam Bo (Southern region) into the Autonomous Republic of Cochinchina and the Highlands into the autonomous Western States (February 1946). They then established the Southern Government in March 1946. These are actions that undermined the national reunification norms. Therefore, the Vietnamese people had to continue struggling to “retain and preserve the victories of the August Revolution, i.e. peace, reunification, independence and democracy.”⁸ On March 6, 1946, Jean Sainteny, French Commissioner of the Republic, signed an agreement with Ho Chi Minh that provided for the recognition of Vietnam as a free state within an Indo-Chinese Federation and as part of the French Union.

Before leaving for France (June 1946), in the Letter to the Southern

7 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, vol. 4 (Hanoi: The National Political Publishing House, 2011), pp.202-203.

8 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, vol. 9 (Hanoi: The National Political Publishing House, 2011), p.36.

people, President Ho Chi Minh once said, "The southern region is the flesh and blood of Vietnam. Rivers may be shallow, mountains may be eroded, but the truth will never change."⁹ The purpose of Ho Chi Minh's trip to France was to resolve the issue of an independent Vietnam, with the unification of the Central, South and North. After returning from France, Ho Chi Minh declared to the Vietnamese people that due to the current situation in France, both independent and unified issues of Vietnam have not been resolved. However, Ho Chi Minh confirmed that "sooner or later, Vietnam is bound to be independent and will be unified."¹⁰ At the meeting on October 31, 1946 of the second National Assembly Session I, after being assigned by the National Assembly to establish a new Government, Ho Chi Minh stated that the purpose of the Government was to "consolidate and gain independence and unify the home country."¹¹ In the Call to the United Nations (December 1946), Ho Chi Minh pointed out France's action to "create the Republic of Cochinchina with a puppet government" and affirmed that the Vietnamese people "firmly fought to protect the most sacred rights: territorial integrity for the Fatherland and independence for the country."¹² The long and heroic resistance of the Vietnamese people ended up with the victory with the strategic advance of Winter-Spring (1953-1954), culminating in the Dien Bien Phu campaign, an eloquent symbol of national unity and independent will (national unity).

After being forced to surrender at the fortress of Dien Bien Phu on May 7, 1954, France realized that it could not continue fighting this costly war far from its shores on the sole ground of anti-communism. The Geneva Accords of July 21, 1954 put an end to the conflict, and France was forced to leave the country. Vietnam was divided into two parts: whilst northern Vietnam fell under the communist control of Ho Chi Minh, a nationalist dictatorship took power the south of the 17th parallel. Laos and Cambodia were officially recognized after

9 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, vol. 4 (Hanoi: The National Political Publishing House, 2011), p.280.

10 *Ibid.*, p.468.

11 *Ibid.*, p.478.

12 *Ibid.*, p.522.

proclaiming their independence in 1953. But unlike France, the U.S. refused to accept the outcome of the Geneva Conference and remained firmly behind the cause of independence for South Vietnam.

Resolutely against the U.S. and the Saigon Government, Abolishing the Division of the Country, Liberating the South, and Unifying the Country

In April 1954, amidst growing tensions regarding the situation in the Korean Peninsula and Indochina, the international community convened a conference in Geneva in the hopes of reaching some sort of accord. The U.S., UK, France, Soviet Union, and China were the primary negotiators, each jockeying to achieve their objectives through backroom negotiations, while other countries which had sent troops in the Korean War or the First Indochina War against the Viet Minh had smaller roles. Meanwhile, as the negotiations were going on in Geneva, the Viet Minh achieved their decisive victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu, which led to France's withdrawal. On July 21, 1954, the results of the Geneva Conference on Indochina were announced. While the Korean question went unanswered, the Conference passed the Geneva Accords, which divided French Indochina into Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Vietnam was to be temporarily partitioned along the 17th parallel with elections scheduled for July 1956. These elections, of course, were never materialized, as Ngo Dinh Diem declared himself leader of the new state of South Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh established a Communist state in the North. Also during this time, the U.S. replaced the French in the South, enforced a long-term policy of partitioning Vietnam, turning the South into a separate, pro-U.S. country, within the "free world" in opposition to "communism." The U.S. and the Saigon government were becoming clearer as the forces that divided the nation and divided the country. The absolute purpose of the Vietnamese people was to fight for peace "to achieve unification, complete independence, and democracy throughout the country."¹³

13 Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Works*, vol. 9 (Hanoi: The National Political Publishing House, 2011), p.37.

At first, the U.S., which had been funding the French war, was content to pour money into South Vietnam's army, and to send its own troops only under the guise of "advisers"—16,300 of them. By March 1965, it was sending its own men into combat. At the peak of the fighting, in 1969, the U.S. was using 550,000 of its own military personnel, plus 897,000 from South Vietnam's army and thousands more from South Korea and other allies. By the time the war was over, the number of dead was beyond counting, possibly as high as 3.8 million, according to a study by the Harvard Medical School and the University of Washington.¹⁴ According to the demands of the U.S., the Saigon government evaded negotiation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, in order to divide Vietnam in the long-term. While the Southern people promoted peaceful political struggle, the Northern people tried to restore the economy, building the North as a basis for the struggle for reunification.

On September 1955, the Vietnam Fatherland Front was established and issued a Declaration calling on the people of all social strata, irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, social composition, political orientation, and religious beliefs, without any discrimination, for peace, unity, independence, and democracy. They called for all Vietnamese people to join hands for the cause of building and defending the North, for the sake of peace and unification of the country. With the will and sentiment of the South and the North as a home country, the Party and the Government paid much attention to taking care of cadres, soldiers, people, and students gathering from the South to the North. In the autumn of 1954, upon hearing that the southern people gathered in Sam Son, Ho Chi Minh wrote a letter of encouragement and encouraged them depending on their strength to participate in the construction of the country. At the same time, he reminded the Minister of Labor, Nguyen The Tao, Head of the Committee, to welcome the gathering forces in Sam Son on behalf of the Party. Likewise, he persuaded the

14 The Guardian 2015a, *Vietnam 40 years on: how a communist victory gave way to capitalist corruption*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/22/vietnam-40-years-on-how-communist-victory-gave-way-to-capitalist-corruption>> (date accessed February 15, 2019).

Government to welcome the Southerners with great concern and love. The North was the foundation and origin of the Vietnamese revolution in the new era, so all tasks in the North were aimed at strengthening the forces of both regions. The most important task of the people, the National Assembly and the Government, was to strive to build socialism in the North, to fight for peace and unification of the country and to contribute to the protection of peace in Southeast Asia and the world. The 3rd Congress of the Vietnam Labor Party (September 1960), with a goal to conduct simultaneously two revolutionary strategies in the two regions, had gone down in history as the Congress of Socialist Construction in the North and struggled to reunify the country.

After the defeats, the South, the North, and the U.S. were forced to calm down and enter into negotiations by signing the Paris Agreement (January 27, 1973), acknowledging the basic national rights of Vietnam such as its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. However, after the U.S. and the Saigon government undermined the Agreement, the Vietnamese people had to continue to fight. It was a fierce confrontation between peace and war, between righteousness and violence, and between national independence and national unification with ethnic division and division of the country. By the 1975 Spring Offensive, culminating in the historic Ho Chi Minh campaign, the Vietnamese army and people ended the long battle for more than a century against colonialism, cleansing the humiliation of the loss of their country, and opening the era of national independence, unification, and socialism. North and South Vietnam were reunited under the control of the Communist North Vietnamese government. The North immediately renamed Saigon "Ho Chi Minh City," after its former president. The Communist government implemented collectivization plans to transform Vietnam into a socialist country. Its policies had disastrous effects on the economy, however, and in the 1980s the government decided to move to a more market-based, capitalist economy.

The reunification meant that for the first time Vietnam existed as an independent country and was the first country to succeed in building a model of economic development based on the open and reform policy of "top-down," while maintaining a strong central control from a single-

party communist state. In the meantime, North Korea has remained mired in Cold War isolation while Vietnam's post-war path led toward integration with the globalized economy. The two communist countries share a history of anti-imperialist struggle and ambivalent relations with their common neighbor, China. This paper aims to briefly elaborate on the process of Vietnam's Reunification and examine the period from after Reunification to DoiMoi (Renovation) thereby identifying its implication for the possibility of reunification on the Korean Peninsula. For North Korea, Vietnam's reform model has been widely touted as the economic path for the impoverished and isolated North Korea to follow. In February 2019, North Korea's Chairman and the U.S. President met in Hanoi to try to make progress on denuclearization and move toward the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. The choice of venue naturally draws attention to the "Vietnam model," after which North Korea was "hoped" to model itself.

II. Vietnam from after Reunification to DoiMoi (Renovation) Era

When the last Americans left Saigon on the morning of April 30, 1975, the U.S. lost its first war. The human and economic costs of the Vietnam War were devastating. For the vast numbers of Americans who were deeply affected by the Vietnam debacle (including the military personnel who served there, the families of the nearly 60,000 Americans soldiers who died in Southeast Asia, and the citizens who lost faith in their country because of the events that unfolded), the conflict will remain a defining point in their lives. However, many more Vietnamese died, with estimates ranging from 1.5 million to more than 3.5 million Vietnamese killed in fighting from the mid-1950s until the war's end in 1975. In *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam*, Jeffrey Record, a former civilian adviser in the Mekong Delta, wrote that there were many causes for the American defeat such as: a lack of understanding that this was not just a fight against communists but also a struggle against true-believing Vietnamese nationalists who wanted to repel outside invaders;

underestimating the will and fighting ability of the North Vietnamese and their Viet Cong allies in the south; believing falsely that the United States had the will and military might to win; and wrongly concluding that the South Vietnamese would fight and govern effectively over the long-term.¹⁵

Vietnam had been a political, military, and moral battle field for years. Many important factors would influence Vietnam's decision such as which side of Vietnam would prevail in the international contest between communists and non-communists; whether western countries would continue to dominate the ex-colonial world; whether small countries could stand up to big ones; and whether guerrillas could defeat modern armies. These factors, simple in outline, remain almost as hard to answer today as they were on the day Saigon fell. The plain fact that the American war in Vietnam was a mistake and a crime—because it was undertaken so lightly, pursued so brutally, and abandoned so perfidiously—is about the only plain fact there is.¹⁶

The Vietnam War was a brutal war with many casualties. After reunification, Vietnam was in a state of physical ruin. Infrastructures were devastated by bombing. Unexploded shells and landmines littered the countryside, often underwater and in the paddy fields where peasants waded. Millions of hectares of forest had been stripped of life by high explosives and Agent Orange. The new government reckoned that two-thirds of the villages in the south had been destroyed. Nationally, the new government estimated that it was dealing with 10 million refugees, 1 million war widows, 880,000 orphans, 362,000 war invalids, and 3 million unemployed people. The economy was in chaos. Right after unification, the inflation was running at up to 900%, and a

15 Kenneth T. Walsh 2015, *The U.S. and Vietnam: 40 Years After the Fall of Saigon - America's first taste of defeat in war shaped perceptions of the U.S. at home and abroad*, <<https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/04/30/the-us-and-vietnam-40-years-after-the-fall-of-saigon>> (date accessed February 20, 2019).

16 The Guardian 2015b, "Forty years on from the fall of Saigon: witnessing the end of the Vietnam war," <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/21/40-years-on-from-fall-of-saigon-witnessing-end-of-vietnam-war>> (date accessed February 20, 2019).

country full of paddy fields had to import rice. In peace talks in Paris, the U.S. had agreed to pay \$3.5bn in reconstruction aid to mend the shattered infrastructure. However, it never paid a cent. Adding insult to penury, the U.S. went on to demand that the communist government repay millions of dollars borrowed by its enemy, the old Saigon regime. Vietnam desperately needed the world to provide the trade and aid that could turn its economy around. As soon as it had lost the war, the U.S. imposed a trade embargo, cutting off the war-wrecked country not only from U.S. exports and imports, but also from those of other nations that bowed to U.S. pressure. In the same way, the U.S. leaned on multilateral bodies including the IMF, the World Bank, and UNESCO to deny Vietnam aid. The U.S. acknowledged that Agent Orange was likely to cause serious illness and birth defects and paid \$2bn compensation—but only to its own veterans. The Vietnamese victims—more than 2 million of them—got nothing. The day after the North Vietnamese took Saigon, the country was reunified, this time under the policies of North Vietnam. Under the new planned economy, the large manufacturers of South Vietnam were to be joined with the predominantly agricultural-based North in a balanced economy. Embracing the free market, Vietnam's economy had gone from one of the worst to one of the hottest in Southeast Asia in the past 20 years. Vietnam's foreign relations have taken the same 180-degree route. The U.S. is no longer the enemy, and Americana culture appears to be winning the "hearts and minds" of a new generation of young Vietnamese peacefully.¹⁷

It is not clear how any economic model could have survived this hostile encirclement. Inevitably, Vietnam's socialist project began to collapse. It adopted a crude Soviet policy that forced peasant farmers to hand over their crops in exchange for ration cards. With no incentive to produce, output crashed, inflation climbed back towards wartime levels, and the country once again had to import rice. In the early 1980s, the leadership was forced to allow the peasants to start selling surplus

17 Aljazeera 2015, *Vietnam 40 years on: how a communist victory gave way to capitalist corruption*, <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/04/vietnam-40-years-fall-saigon-150429100025151.html>> (date accessed February 22, 2019).

produce so capitalism began its return. By the late 1980s, the party was officially adopting the idea of “a market economy with socialist orientation.” During the 6th party congress in December 1986, the Communist Party decided to reform the economic system, called DoiMoi (renovation). The political elite opted for a gradual change of the economy, without changing the political system. The economic development induced by the reforms was remarkable. Since the introduction of DoiMoi, Vietnam endured remarkable economic growth. The Foreign Investment Law, passed in 1987 and implemented the following year, completely liberalized former socialist policies (100 percent foreign ownership of businesses in Vietnam; foreigners permitted to conduct business in-country and send profits home; and tax breaks and investment for technology, consumer goods, and processing of raw materials).¹⁸

In March 1988, Resolution 10 was passed, furthering the development of reform in Vietnam. This resolution abolished the collectivization of agriculture and paved the way for agricultural growth. The government distributed land to households who in turn were given full authority in production and investment. With the abolition of government contracts, goods could be sold at market prices to the public as well the state. These reforms were further broadened in 1992 when land-use rights were extended. Farmers could now hold onto land for up to 75 years. The liberalization of agriculture produced quick, impressive results. Vietnam is now the world's third largest importer of rice, when it previously had been a net importer.¹⁹ It cannot be denied that the market forces freed by DoiMoi have produced strong economic growth in Vietnam during the 1990s. DoiMoi has created a more productive and resilient economy, and a more optimistic atmosphere. Market principles are now accepted as the basis for remunerating labor, for determining land use, and even for determining public sector

18 Gerald Tan, *ASEAN Economic Development and Cooperation*, Second ed. (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 2000), p.139.

19 Garry Rodan, Kevin Hewison, Richard Robison, eds., *The Political Economy of Southeast Asia: Conflicts, Crises and Change* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.218.

accountability. During this period, foreign investors were allowed to come in and private businesses were encouraged with free trade, free markets, profits for some, and wages for others. Behind the scenes, the government was sending signals of compromise to Washington. It stopped asking for the \$3.5bn reconstruction aid or compensation for Agent Orange and war crimes. It even agreed to repay the old Saigon regime's war debt of \$146m. By 1994, the U.S. was appeased and lifted the trade embargo that had been throttling Vietnam for nearly 20 years. The World Bank, the IMF, and other donors began to help. The economy started growing by up to 8.4% a year, and Vietnam was soon one of the world's biggest exporters of rice.

Crucially, throughout the 1990s, there were still strong factions within the Communist Party that defended socialism against the new tide of capitalism. In spite of the economic chaos, they had succeeded in engineering a dramatic reduction of poverty. When the war ended, 70% of Vietnam's people lived below the official poverty line. By 1992, it was 58%. By 2000, it was 32%. At the same time, the government had constructed a network of primary schools in every community, and secondary schools in most of the community; it had also built a basic structure of free healthcare. For a while, the socialist factions still had enough political muscle to direct the new capitalist vehicle. Three times during the late 1990s, the World Bank offered extra loans worth hundreds of millions of dollars if Vietnam would agree to sell its state-owned companies and cut its trade tariffs. Each deal was rejected. In 1995, Vietnam joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), becoming the first communist member. Vietnam also committed itself to contributing to the ASEAN Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA) and signed a bi-lateral trade agreement with the U.S. in 2000.²⁰

During the period 2001-2005, the government has set several socio-economic targets focusing on macroeconomic stability, growth, inflation control, productivity, trade, investment, and increasing the economy's competitiveness. The implementation of DoiMoi policy has brought about important achievements in all aspects of social life in Vietnam.

20 Melanie Beresford & Dang Phong, *Economic Transition in Vietnam* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2000), p. 124.

Political and social stability has been maintained. A socialist-oriented market economy has basically been built; the commodity economy has been built from the self-supplying economy; a multi-sectoral economy with multiple forms of ownership has been built; and a closed economy has been changed to an open, internationally integrative and cooperative economy.

III. Implication for the Reunification in the Korean Peninsula and North Korea

Implication for the Korean Peninsula

Prior to World War I and Japan's annexation of Korea, all of Korea was unified as a single state for centuries, previously known as the Goryeo and Joseon dynasties, and the last unified state, the Korean Empire. After World War II and beginning in the Cold War, Korea was divided into two countries along the 38th parallel (the Korean Demilitarized Zone). Korean reunification refers to the potential unification of the DPRK and ROK into a single Korean sovereign state. In June 2000, the process towards reunification was started by the June 15th North-South Joint Declaration. This was reaffirmed by the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula in April 2018 and the joint statement of the United States President Donald Trump and North Korean Chairman Kim Jong Un at the Singapore Summit in June 2018. The second DPRK-U.S. summit in Hanoi, which ended without an agreement, was bound to be a new starting point on the long journey toward "the building of a lasting and robust peace regime on the Korean Peninsula," in the words of the joint statement signed by North Korea and the U.S. at the Singapore summit.²¹

The hypothetical reunification of the Korean Peninsula is often

21 Hankyoreh 2019, *News analysis, The ambiguous results of the 2nd North Korea-US summit*, <http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/884475.html> (date accessed February 25, 2019).

compared to other countries, which had divided governments and reunified, including Germany and Vietnam. The idea that the Korean Peninsula can possibly seek another re-unification, liberalization, and development success story like Vietnam sounds promising because the similarities between Viet. and Korea can be traced clearly. The contacts between Vietnam and Korea (before Korea's partition) can be traced back to the 13th century, when Prince Ly Long Tuong of the Ly Dynasty self-exiled to the Koryo Dynasty in 1226 AD after a coup d'état by General Tran Hung Dao. This relation could also be found in the context of counterparts with China as both were under China's invasion and rule. The other common features of the two cultures are the profound influence of Chinese cultural factors. The history of Vietnamese culture and of Korean culture can be summarized in only two categories, Sinicization and De-Sinicization. In order to struggle against cultural assimilation and at the same time to absorb the positive factors of Chinese culture, Vietnam and Korea carried out De-Sinicization.²² Both Vietnamese and Korean culture originate on the basis of one sustainable source of indigenous culture so all external factors must be adapted and combined with endogenous conditions, enriching the background and national culture and improving national identity.

Both the Korean and Vietnam Wars resulted from tensions created by post-colonial political solutions to the decolonization process. For centuries before the division, the peninsula was a single, unified Korea, ruled by generations of dynastic kingdoms. In 1905, Korea, occupied by Japan after the Russo-Japanese War and formally annexed five years later, chafed under Japanese colonial rule for 35 years until the end of World War II, when its division into two nations began. In 1945, there was a clear division between North and South Korea ever since the surrendering of Japan. It was the Allied victory that ended Japan's thirty five-year occupation of Korea. Like Vietnam, Korea was also a divided nation, with communism entrenched in the northern parts and anti-

22 Vo Van Sen 2016, *Towards the comprehensive flourishing of Vietnam-Korea relations*, <http://cefia.aks.ac.kr:84/index.php?title=TOWARDS_THE_COMPREHENSIVE_FLOURISHMENT_OF_VIETNAM-KOREA_RELATIONS#cite_note-3> (date accessed June 17, 2019).

communism in the southern areas. Unlike another Cold War-era separation, between East and West Germany, there has been extremely little movement across the DMZ between North and South Korea since 1953. Robinson describes the border as “hermetically sealed,” which helps to explain the drastically different paths the two nations have taken and the continuing divide between them.²³

After the Korean War, the ROK’s economy prospered under a series of capitalist dictatorships and the country eventually became a democracy. South Korea launched its Nordpolitik—Northern Policy to normalize diplomatic relations with socialist countries. North Korea remains an economic basket case and a police state which has been ruled by the same family for three generations. The legacy of that dark century has left the ROK’s security guaranteed by an American Defense Treaty while the DPRK is tied to a military pact with China in the event of it being attacked. Meanwhile, the DPRK remained an isolated “hermit kingdom” particularly after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s and economically underdeveloped, as well as a virtual police state ruled by a single family for three generations. The North’s dedicated efforts to develop a nuclear program have also greatly heightened tensions with the ROK and its allies, particularly the U.S. The divisions put in place mid-way through the 20th century still remain stark today.

With its historical and cultural similarities, the experiences of Vietnam’s reunification and renovation can be a good example for both Koreas. At the 2015 Korea-Vietnam Peace Conference, the ROK Ambassador to Hanoi, Jun DaeJoo evaluated Vietnam highly that Vietnam after reunification has boosted strong socio-economic development through its reform policy, while the DPRK is still turning its back on the development of the people and concentrating only on military development such as developing nuclear weapons and missiles. With the experience of post-reunification in Vietnam in mind, Jun also emphasized that the case of the two Koreas’ reunification would also contribute to the peace and prosperity of the Korean Peninsula as well as

23 Sarah Pruitt 2018, *Why Are North and South Korea Divided?*, <<https://www.history.com/news/north-south-korea-divided-reasons-facts>> (date accessed February 25, 2019).

East Asia. He further mentioned that Vietnam should play an active role for the peace and unity of the Korean Peninsula.

Vietnam plays an important role in supporting and orienting the reunification process on the Korean Peninsula. Vietnam advocates the DPRK to renounce its nuclear weapons and improve its people's lives, thus contributing to the peace and stability of the world. Vietnam has long put forward the message of being an active member and a reliable and responsible partner of the international community. Vietnam has consistently supported all efforts to promote dialogue and uphold peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, urging each party to earnestly observe the United Nations Security Council resolutions, actively strive for peace, and make practical contributions to the maintenance of peace.

Recently, the emerging context of the two Koreas has many outstanding features. During the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit on the South Korean side of the Peace House in the Joint Security Area, the ROK President Moon Jae-in and the DPRK Chairman Kim Jong Un adopted the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula. This joint statement aims to prosper and unify the Korean Peninsula, including an ambitious plan that will go beyond the Korean Armistice Agreement of 1953 to officially end the Korean War. However, although this Declaration referred to the phrase "Reunification," the prospect of reunifying the two Koreas is still quite obscure. Due to the large difference in economic development between South Korea and North Korea after more than seven decades of partition, the inter-Korean integration process will inevitably face a series of problems regarding politics, economy, society, and culture. This means that the two countries need to join hands, carefully develop, and implement the process of cooperation and unification on the Korean Peninsula, in parallel with the learning experiences of other countries like Vietnam. Vietnam is a nation that is really fond of peace but also had to suffer from wars, and usually the wars ended with peace negotiations. Vietnam is also a country that has experienced the process of reunifying the North and South regions with the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976. This historical context has many similarities with the context of the two Koreas today.

In 2019, the Korean Peninsula continues to attract the attention of the international community in which the second DPRK-U.S. summit expected to create a breakthrough. Vietnam's hosting of the high-stakes talks marks its emergence as a trustworthy, responsible member of the international community that has forged peace with old enemies and can now help others to do so. This is also a typical example of Vietnam's active and positive foreign policy, which clearly presents itself as a "middle power" aiming to contribute to the creation of peace and prosperity for the world. Vietnam reveled in its newfound role as an arbiter of peace at the DPRK-U.S. summit. While the leaders of DPRK and the U.S. debated banishing nuclear bombs from the Korean Peninsula, the host of their summit in February 2019, Vietnam, long almost synonymous with war, was relishing its role as a promoter of peace.²⁴

One of the biggest obstacles that was posed by the Hanoi summit was the question of how to overcome the continuing lack of trust between the DPRK and the U.S. in regard to the concept and mode of denuclearization. The outcome of the Hanoi summit between the DPRK leader and the U.S. President reveals the results that could be the driver of future efforts and the obstacles that must be overcome if the next summit is to be held. However, many people who are thinking of North-South Korea reunification in the context of the relationship between the two regions are witnessing many positive changes and turning points. How would the Korean Peninsula be when the two Koreas reunify? In the case of reunification, would the Korean Peninsula most likely become a superpower? The followings analyses are worth examining. As of 2004, the ROK joined the elite club of trillion-dollar economies, and today it ranks as the world's 11th largest economy in terms of GDP.²⁵ It is believed that its reunification with the DPRK would certainly give the

24 Reuters 2019, *Vietnam revels in newfound role as arbiter of peace in N. Korea-US summit*, <<https://www.france24.com/en/20190226-vietnam-revels-newfound-role-arbiter-peace-north-korea-usa-nuclear-summit>> (date accessed February 28, 2019).

25 Investopedia 2019, *North Korean vs. South Korean Economies: What's the Difference?*, <<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/forex/040515/north-korean-vs-south-korean-economies.asp>> (date accessed February 28, 2019).

ROK more opportunities for economic development. It may even be an opportunity to unprecedentedly expand its territorial economy. A country made up of the ROK-DPRK would more easily access China's vast market by both railway and road. That means the opportunity for commercial development would be huge like adding wings to the "Asian dragon." Simultaneously, the economic sectors of the DPRK would be enhanced and provided with new resources; agricultural output would be increased many times thanks to the application of modern technologies from the ROK; and an abundant labor force, mainly from the DPRK's agricultural sector, may be able to work in the ROK's factories. In this case, the ROK would relocate its overseas factories to the DPRK to attract more laborers.

Besides, the reunification of Seoul and Pyongyang will also open up the opportunity to tap into resources that are almost untouched in the DPRK. It is believed that the DPRK has huge reserves of natural resources such as gold, copper, etc. In other words, a country that still has a lot of development potential and resources that have not been utilized like the DPRK would be able to "flare up" its vitality when reunified with the ROK's existing potential. As a result, the economy of the Korean Peninsula may develop. In terms of military strength, according to Global Firepower in 2018, South Korea ranked as the 7th most powerful military in the world.²⁶ The ROK's rise to 7th place is due to its emphasis on national defense construction, as well as owning the world's sixth largest active military manpower and the second largest active reserve forces (2.97 million). Furthermore, the ROK has also proposed the development of a strategic air force with integrated air and space capabilities and a strategic mobile fleet with ocean-going combat capabilities (China Military Online 2018). On the other border, the DPRK ranks 18th and is the only nation in the world having 25.66% of its people in the armed service (active and reserve both included). Recently, the DPRK successfully launched ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile), a direct threat to the U.S. mainland and announced the launch

26 CEO World Magazine 2018, *The World's Most Powerful Militaries In 2018*, <<https://ceoworld.biz/2018/11/23/the-worlds-most-powerful-militaries-in-2018/>> (dated accessed February 28, 2019).

of a Hydrogen bomb small enough to fit on top of an ICBM—a serious concern for America. In case of the ROK's combination with the DPRK, a reunified Korea would have a much stronger, disciplined army with well-equipped weapons compared to the ROK alone.

In addition, if the reunification promoted by the DPRK leader Kim Jong Un is achieved, this could also empower the nation's self-esteem, which is already highly regarded by the South Korean, thus becoming a driving force that would make the Korean Peninsula a greater reunified country again. At the end of April 2018, many people had very different views of the DPRK leader when he delivered a speech that touched the hearts of his people and the world. He expressed his determination to put the interests of his people first and really wanted to reunify with the ROK. He pledged a "new history" with the South Koreans. Together with his counterpart, President Moon Jae-in, he agreed to work on a permanent peace agreement and work toward a complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. They both pledged to work for the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and agreed on a common goal of a "nuclear-free" Peninsula.²⁷ Moon called the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit at Panmunjeom "historical" and "a valuable time." To achieve a complete peace, the two nations will collaborate and "change the order of the Korean Peninsula." Kim similarly praised Moon, saying this moment had been a long time coming. "Same people, same blood, so we cannot be separated and should live together in unification," Kim said. "I hope we live together soon as a new path forward."²⁸

It can possibly be noted that the combination of a ROK economic miracle and successful economic growth model with a rich DPRK potential can create a superpower that surpasses Japan as it has to import resources while the Korean Peninsula has all available resources

27 Gulf News 2018, *Look: Korean leaders trade jokes, hugs*, <<https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/look-korean-leaders-trade-jokes-hugs-1.2212490>> (date accessed March 03, 2019).

28 ABC News 2018, *North Korea, South Korea agree to end war, denuclearize peninsula*, <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/north-korea-south-korea-agree-end-war-denuclearize/story?id=54774515>> (date accessed March 03, 2019).

for its development. In other words, a Reunified Korea can strengthen its economy and attract foreign investment, tourism, and infrastructure. However, it can also be admitted that the reunification of the Korean Peninsula will not be easy and faces many difficulties. To have a unified government, a newly Reunified Korea may have to neutralize their political institutions. Moreover, they then have to devote resources to upgrade their infrastructure and improve the quality of education for the North Koreans. It may take decades to achieve positive effects. Of course, in the beginning, it may be very difficult for the North's economy to be on par with the South. In the case of its military, it may also be difficult to merge militarily the two Koreas. The new government system and economic barriers would also be very large and difficult to overcome. It is even argued that compared to the ROK, a Reunified Korea could recess for a decade or two. However, despite these difficulties, the leaders of the two Koreas are expressing their determination to reunify the two regions after decades of separation. It is also the desire of most people on the Korean Peninsula.

What Can the DPRK Learn from the Vietnamese Economic Model?

The two countries, after all, have much in common, at least on the surface: Both suffered through colonial rule, tragic national divisions between a communist north and capitalistic south, devastating conflicts with the U.S., and disastrous post-revolutionary experiments in communism.²⁹ In February 2019, Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump met in Hanoi to try to make progress on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The choice of venue naturally draws attention to the "Vietnam model," which some analysts have expressed an interest in. In many ways, we can see that the modern DPRK is equivalent to Vietnam in the 1980s. For one, the Communist Party of Vietnam has ruled the state ever since its independence in 1945, just as the Workers' Party of Korea has always governed the DPRK. The two countries "were both under United Nations sanctions, in the case of DPRK, for developing

29 Geoffrey Cain 2019, *North Korea Is Not Vietnam*, <<https://newrepublic.com/article/153174/north-korea-not-vietnam>> (date accessed March 04, 2019).

nuclear weapons, and in the case of Vietnam, for occupying a foreign country. Perhaps the biggest parallel is Pyongyang's desire to reform its economy, just like Hanoi did decades ago."³⁰ Like North Korea now, Vietnam between 1975 and 1995 was crippled by economic sanctions and a U.S. trade embargo. In the late 1980s, Vietnam embraced free-market reforms. That eventually opened the country up and resulted in its present socialist-oriented economy. Vietnam's frontier market is now one of the world's fastest-growing economies, thanks to an expanding middle-class, a strong manufacturing sector, and a young population. After more than three decades, it is starting to see fruitful results, as Vietnam's economy grew 7.1 percent in 2018, above its initial target of 6.7 percent. In 2019, the U.S. and China celebrated their 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties. The U.S. normalized relations with Vietnam in 1995. The similarities between Korean and Vietnamese cultures could make it easier for the DPRK to take after Vietnam's economic model.

Subsequent DPRK economic deficiencies and isolation provide a stark contrast of chosen paths between the divergent former allies. Vietnam has committed to economic liberalization, while the DPRK remains a pariah with non-existent foreign investment and a perpetual reliance on China.³¹ In this context, protecting the power of the party, remaining unaffected by capitalism, and not dependent on populists are the three main objectives set forth by North Korean leaders on the path of reform and an open door. By making a strategic decision on giving up the parallel development of its nuclear potential and focusing on economic growth, Pyongyang has made it clear to the world community that the country has a determined development model. But it seems that this model could not be based on the experience of the DPRK's closest allies (China and Russia) but Vietnam. Vietnam has won the prolonged war with the U.S. and experienced reunifying the North and South.

30 Lowy Institute 2019, *The Vietnamese venue will shape the second Trump-Kim summit*, <<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/the-interpreter/Vietnamese-venue-shape-second-Trump-Kim-summit>> (date accessed March 04, 2019).

31 Chris Scott 2017, *Vietnam's role in North Korea: a friendship endures?*, <<https://cms.ati.ms/2017/07/vietnams-role-north-korea-friendship-endures/>> (date accessed May 05, 2019).

Vietnam is also the first country to succeed in building a model of economic development based on the opening-up and a top-down system of control, while maintaining a strong and effective centralized control of the Communist Party. All of this seems very close to the DPRK. In the course of the inter-Korean summit in April 2018, the DPRK's Chairman Kim Jong Un mentioned the opportunity to develop in line with the Vietnamese model.

The DPRK has been willing to experiment with reforms under Kim Jong Un. In 2014, Kim also introduced measures to reduce farm sizes and allow some production for household use and sale in markets. Since 2016, these reforms have been expanded and greater emphasis has been placed on more decentralized decision-making. Chairman Kim has also embarked on a peace offensive to improve relations with the international community, reflected by his landmark meetings with the presidents of South Korea and the U.S. Vietnam has also maintained "geopolitical flexibility and relationship-building." President Trump once said that Vietnam's "thriving" economy could serve as an "awesome" model offering many growth opportunities for North Korea, if Pyongyang completely dismantles its nuclear arsenal. These developments "are likely to be admired" by Pyongyang. Hanoi enjoys close ties with Washington despite stark ideological differences and decades of hostility during the Vietnam War. The Asian nation has also managed to cultivate ties with many countries, including both Koreas, Russia, Japan, and India. Given their respective emphasis on political stability, China and Singapore have also been touted as potential role models for Pyongyang, but both have their disadvantages in the eyes of the DPRK leader. Pyongyang wishes to emphasize its independence from, rather than subordination to Beijing while Singapore's path may be unsuitable due to its smaller size. Any DPRK attempt at liberalization will depend on the progress of ongoing nuclear negotiations. If Kim makes good on his promise to denuclearize, sanctions could be lifted, paving the way for Pyongyang to resume foreign trade. The lifting of sanctions, coupled with economic reforms and changes in national security policy and international relations, "could help put the DPRK

economy on a path of stable growth and economic integration.³²

Vietnam could be an appropriate choice for the DPRK. In many ways, modern North Korea is equivalent to Vietnam in the 1980s. The DPRK has long studied China's economic development model and even tried to implement it. But since Kim Jong Un took over as the top leader of the country, China's model has been increasingly evaluated in a more negative way as if the DPRK were to follow China's path, the DPRK would be under Chinese intervention and depend on this country. Implementing its own reform policy within the framework of collective leadership, China relies heavily on the formation and attraction of large capital, boldly opening up its economy in special economic zones such as Shenzhen. However, from the DPRK's point of view, this is seen as a failure to maintain the centralized Chinese government's control system. In Russia, the Communist Party had completely lost its dominance, therefore, Russia's experience may increasingly be considered unworthy for the DPRK to learn and follow. For the case of Vietnam, Vietnam had tried to create a commodity economy while firmly protecting its bold political system. Through the effectiveness of its renovation and by keeping its open-door policy to a minimum, Vietnam succeeded in creating a social market economy from the DPRK's viewpoint.

Vietnam had the right leaders, despite their well-documented flaws, at just the right time as the Cold War was winding down, and the markets were set to open globally. North Korea has no such benefit. Under the leadership of the Communist Party, Vietnam has long been ideologically sympathetic to the DPRK, but this has not become an excuse for the development of economic cooperation. Pyongyang would ask Hanoi to share its historical experience and give advice on the process of changing the political system. But considering that even Russia and the DPRK can only achieve trade turnover of \$ 100 million a year, it is then difficult to predict in what areas it will cooperate with Vietnam. Unless the U.S.-DPRK relations improved and sanctions are lifted, Vietnam's economic cooperation with the DPRK could be

32 CNBC 2019, *North Korea may choose to follow Vietnam's economic model as it looks to open up*, <<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/13/north-korea-may-choose-to-follow-vietnams-economic-model.html>> (date accessed May 25, 2019).

enhanced by the implementation of the region's joint projects of South and North. Vietnam has not made isolating DPRK a matter of policy, maintaining an embassy in Pyongyang, and supporting DPRK participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum. Vietnam has presided over DPRK-Japanese reconciliation talks, while also offering advice on economic development and reform. DPRK delegations continue to visit Vietnam. High-level delegations in 2010, 2012, and 2015 underscore that the two sides are committed to the optics of a formal partnership, with meetings steeped in dated communist vernacular, and have signed a number of agreements on police training, science, and technology.

IV. Conclusion

Vietnam has consistently supported any and all efforts to promote dialogue and uphold peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, urging each party to earnestly observe United Nations Security Council resolutions, actively strive for peace, and make practical contributions to the maintenance of peace. But despite rhetoric to the contrary in bilateral meetings, Hanoi's apprehension towards Pyongyang and institutionalizing a preference for Seoul have decisively brought an end to the spirit of communist fraternity of the previous century. Vietnam embraces international law in this regard and consistently advocates for nuclear non-proliferation on the Korean Peninsula by publicly denouncing North Korean nuclear ambitions. Vietnam pursues a policy of non-isolation with the hermit nation, perpetuating efforts to bring DPRK into the international community and ease regional tensions. But with little substance to an increasingly distant bilateral relationship, it is hardly in a position to play a major role as mediator between the Kim regime (winner nation against the U.S.) and the U.S. itself (which lost every war possible against Vietnam, DPRK, Cambodia, China...).

In the context of a dialogue about denuclearization being stalled, the presence of the DPRK Foreign Minister Lee Yong-ho in Hanoi could be interpreted as a signal that Pyongyang is determined to strengthen the new development model as well as achieve economic growth, regardless

of the direction of establishing relations with the U.S. It seems that the visit of the Chairman of the DPRK Supreme People's Congress Kim Yong-nam to Cuba, as well as the recent research on railways that has just begun with the ROK, also pursued the above goals. However, does DPRK listen to the advice of traditional allies, as well as those of good will, or still decide to choose its own path according to the Juche ideology? For the time being we can or cannot answer this question. Thus, the question is would the DPRK put its past behind it and restart its economy like its ideological allies, China and Vietnam? If so, the DPRK may have the potential to grow at a similar pace as those two countries have.

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