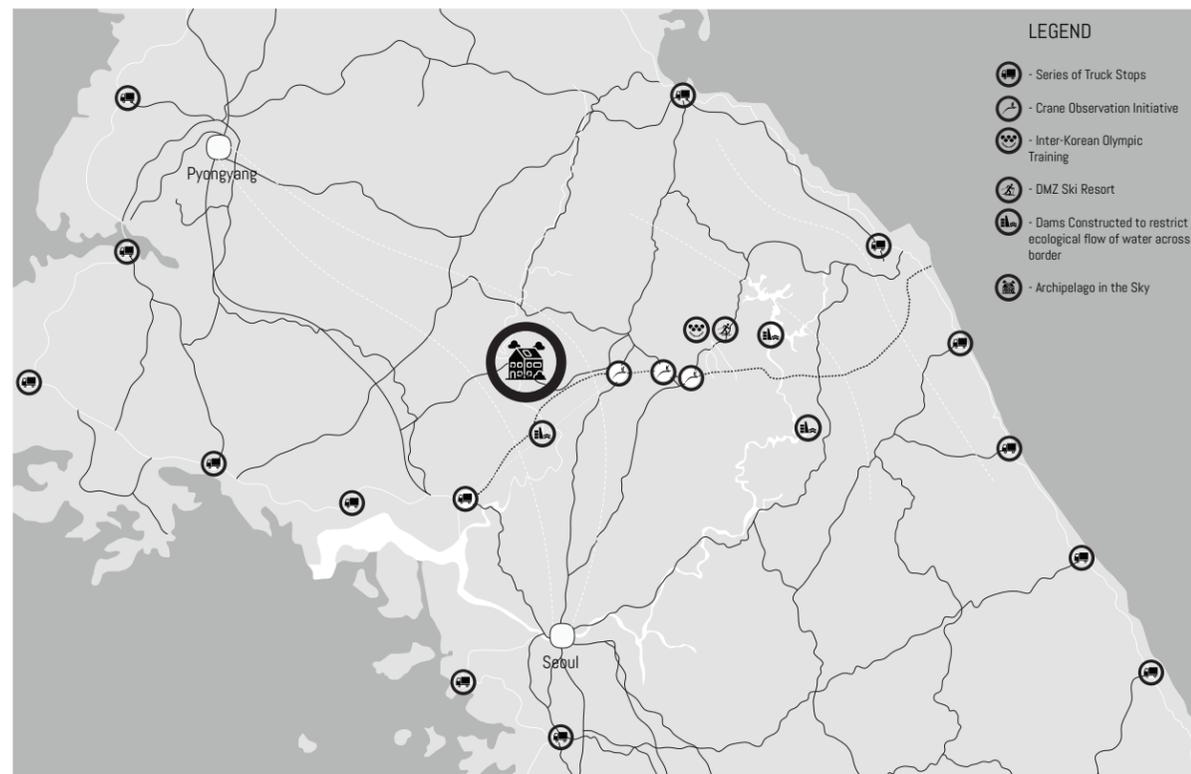


한 • Experimental Connections
• for a Unified Korea

Whenever the Korean reunification process is brought up in media or conversation, the opinions of the average person often are those with indifference or rather pessimistic, where there are those that do not believe unification is possible nor do they think that North and South Korea should unify. The current public opinions are very archaic, in that the mainstream media does not cover the more recent discoveries of everyday life in North Korea, including a black-market capitalist economy system, and an existing middle class that lives a similar lifestyle to a middle-class citizen in more modern societies. The primary purpose of this thesis is to introduce an alternative perspective to the average person in hopes of giving consideration to different factors of the unification process that are not mentioned in mainstream media in an effort to set a change in opinion of those that believe that the unification process is an impossible future.

The main reason to why the public opinion has an outdated perspective of both the unification process and North Korea's lifestyle is because the situation is only being viewed primarily from two lens: the political and the economic lens. The majority of the news cover either the happenings of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and his regime, or the accounts of the defectors that escape North Korea. These two elements emphasize the political and economic institutions that separate North Korea, which is totalitarian and communist, and South Korea, which is a democracy and capitalistic. This focus only serves to hinder the considerations for potential futures that a unified Korea can take from the social lens. Through the swaying of the public opinion on the possible connections that can be further evaluated, there can be an overall increase in opinions where one may think the Korean unification process may be a more plausible and desirable solution, with benefits to both North and South Korea.



An overview of speculated interventions on the DMZ.

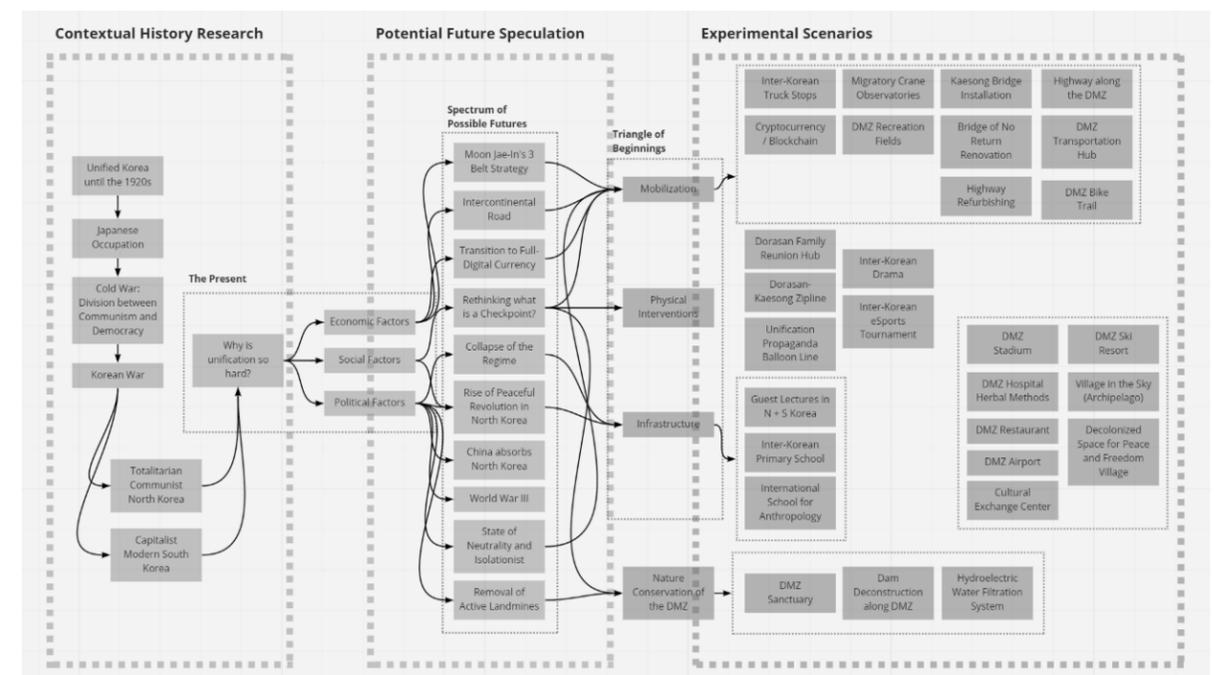
Emotions precede Interactions.

Interactions take place in Space.

Space is not limited to the Physical.

This thesis proposal focuses on the social lens on the current situation between North and South Korea. In the social lens, we think about the present emotions of the people from both countries, and their imagined interactions in spaces that primarily exist along the DMZ. But these spaces don't exist as just the physical, but rather an emotional connection as well.

This can also be interpreted through the different possibilities of communication that is widely used today, such as the phone, the TV, the internet, etc. This pays homage to the aspect of "expanded architecture", where the creation of a space is only the first part of the process, and the social infrastructure behind the space must also be considered, thus potentially "expanding" the role of the architect with potential for agency in design beyond the physical realm.



Framework leading to an "Agency to Design".

As someone that was born in the United States, this thesis was essentially a journey for me to commune with my Korean heritage by doing extensive research on the history of Korea and understanding the circumstances in which they were divided. Before any claims for speculation were made, a thorough understanding of their history is required in order to justify the opinions that are being stated. This research was consolidated and presented as an exhibition during the "Metathesis: CMU School of Architecture Exhibition". This exhibition serves as a space for convergence, where users from various backgrounds come together and engage in conversation whilst surrounded by both projected futures and historical precedents explaining how North and South Korea became what they are today. The layout of the exhibition also served to convey the core concepts of the thesis, where a zone was intentionally cut off from the circulation

flow to represent the divide as a pair of stanchions and potted plants. These plants represent the "accidental sanctuary" that the DMZ has become, where the absence of human presence has led to the cultivation of a diverse set of plants and animals, which leads to an implication on preserving the conditions of the DMZ when speculating new development.

After the exhibition, there was a survey that was sent out to the audience asking how the exhibition has reconfigured their perspective on North Korea and the unification process, along with anything they found interesting within the discourse that they had with other users of the exhibit. There was a focus on the age group of my generation, (18-24), as this is the transitional generation that moves towards a more progressive outlook on the unification process from the conservative.



"Metathesis: CMU School of Architecture - Spring 2019"

Exhibition Testimonies

KOREAN-AMERICAN

Hyeon Ju Song, 22

The exhibition put my abstract thoughts about the unification process of Korea into concrete images. The images brought to life some aspects of Korean society that were impacted by the unification and did so in a very realistic way.

Mirra Yu, 21

The exhibition allowed me to picture a unified Korea through interactive pieces, such as the book and the 3D map. I learned that North Korea is a lot more different than what the media presents it as. The pieces in the exhibit were very interesting and relevant in showing what the unification process would look like (modeling after migratory paths, using nature/ecosystems to further facilitate the unification, etc.)

Sophia Kim, 20

Before I saw this exhibition, I was unsure about the unification of North and South Korea mainly because of the political and economic differences between the two. Because this exhibition talked about unification of the people, I saw this thesis as an opportunity for South Korean people to stop judging the people from the North and to start seeing them as human beings. In South Korea, because this country is so developed (from technology), South Korean people misinterpret materialism as freedom, which makes them judge North Korean people to have no freedom. This exhibition gave me hope of society being able to unify and become one Korea.

HISPANIC-AMERICAN

Hannah Martinez, 23

I think for me it placed the geography of the physical places in perspective with the politics of the two different (but maybe not always different) countries more than anything else.

KOREAN

Jisoo Geum, 20

While I personally oppose the unification of the two countries for political reasons, the exhibition gave me a new social perspective on the lives of North Koreans. My entire life I was educated to see them as refugees. But the photo comparison of north and south Koreans' lives made me realize that we are inherently the same people under a similar social structure, despite the difference in our governmental system. It's only unfortunate to see that the government and education system in both countries have made people grow under prejudice and stereotypes.

Taewan Kim, 24

When I hear a word "unification" in terms of Korean peninsula, I think of it as a unification that North Korea and South Korea unite and become one nation. However, unification process can be a form of inter-exchange and cooperation in many ways. That changed my perspective on the unification. Unification deals with a number of complex thoughts and conflicts to overcome, and it's very tricky to find out a solution for us to solve the problem.

Se Eun Park, 21

I have always been interested in the topic of the unification and this exhibition solidified that interest even more. The visualization of comparing and contrasting North and South Koreans taught me how similar the people of both countries are and that even though we tend to pity the citizens of North Korea, people are actually living their lives beyond the DMZ.

Jihoon Park, 24

Growing up in South Korea, I was always exposed to the South Korean educational system that allowed me to open up to the concept of unification unlike my parents' generation which always taught them to consider the North Koreans as enemies. However, during my mandatory service in the military, there was a conflict between my primary education and military education, in which taught me to be able to antagonize the North Korean regime to be solely responsible for the sacrifice of my time, hardship, as well as national and human resources. With this background, I was able to build an ambivalent attitude towards reunification, which never had any concrete form of what it could actually be like, or how it would affect the lives of two bodies of citizens. This exhibition was able to demystify the fantasy of reunification that is held in a lot of South Korean Millennials by showing possibilities of ways in which it could happen as well as circumstances and effects.