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What are the Consequences of the Social and Cultural Exchanges between the Two Koreas? Insights from an Experimental Study on the Effect of Superordinate Korean Identity

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Abstract

This study explores whether South Koreans' superordinate identification with North Koreans leads to increased humanization of and empathy for North Koreans as well as reduced negative feelings toward North Koreans. This study also examines whether superordinate identification intensifies support for people-to-people exchanges and unification using an experiment. South Koreans' increased superordinate identification with North Koreans leads to greater humanization of the latter as well as less negative feelings toward them but does not affect support for unification. This suggests that extended contact is enough to generate superordinate identification with the outgroup but not enough to affect support for government policies.

Keywords

Inter-Korean exchanges, Korea, social identity theory, intergroup contact, conflict resolution

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Introduction

The governments of South and North Korea restricted people-to-people exchanges between the people from both sides of the border since the early years of the 1945 division. The two Koreas agreed to hold people-to-people exchanges in the early 1990s, but the actual number of people who participated in people-to-people social and cultural exchanges has been very limited. Hence, evaluating whether these exchanges produced the desired and expected outcomes remains challenging.

Given the small number of participants in inter-Korean exchanges, the best potential outcome these exchanges could produce has been ripple effects, or the multiplying influence of the exchange participants' communication about their experiences. In this paper, we analyze the ripple effects of inter-Korean social and cultural people-to-people exchanges in terms of their potential for facilitating superordinate identification which in turn helps to reduce the antagonization toward the other group. We designed a two-group pre- and post-test experiment to analyze how superordinate identity via the exposure to the experiences of a South Korean who frequently participated in inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges affects ordinary South Koreans' empathy, feelings toward North Koreans, and perspectives regarding inter-Korean relations.

Previous research on inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges has often been descriptive (Hyundai Research Institute, 2018; Jonsson, 2006), or focused on policy suggestions in a normative fashion (Jeon, 2010, 2019; Jung, 2011; Lee, 2015a; Lee and Kim, 2002; Sin and Kim, 2011). Although limited, some empirical research has explored the potential outcomes of inter-Korean contact. In an observatory study, Lee (2003) found that taekwondo, which is the traditional sport of both Koreas, facilitated mutual understanding among participants from both sides. Lee and Gu (2016) concluded that direct interactions in Kaesong Industrial Complex contributed to increased mutual affection between South and North Koreans. Furthermore, Ha (2019) found that even exposure to North Korean music performance through recorded video contributes to South Koreans' feeling more homogeneity with North Koreans. In a similar vein, Ayhan and Jang (2022) found that direct contact between South and North Koreans for social and cultural exchanges reinforces the idea of a superordinate Korean group identity.

Previous studies on inter-Korean relations employed experimental designs mainly in the context of immigration with conflicting results.[1] Chang and Kang's (2020, 2021) studies found that the 2018 US-North Korea Summit in Singapore promoted the salience of superordinate co-ethnic identity between South and North Koreans by alleviating South Koreans' perceived military threat from North Korea; in turn, the Summit led South Koreans to show more positive attitudes toward North Korean refugees in South Korea. Ha et al. (2016) found that South Koreans support more liberal immigration policies when immigrants are framed as co-ethnic North Korean defectors; they are less supportive when cued with Chinese Korean or Indonesian immigrants. Nevertheless, this research does not find more acceptance of Chinese Korean immigrants compared to Indonesian immigrants, although Chinese Korean are also ethnic Koreans. Contrary to Ha, Cho and Kang's findings, Ha and Jang (2016) found that political divergences between the two nations led to the erosion of ethnic identification with North Koreans among South Koreans. In a similar vein, (Denney, Ward, and Green, 2022) found that support for co-ethnic North Korean immigrants is overstated due to social desirability.

Our study contributes to these empirical works through an experimental design, to examine the effects of superordinate identification on South Koreans' perspectives vis-à-vis North Koreans as well as support for North Korea–related policies. Furthermore, we examine the potential ripple effects of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges on the expected outcomes of the exchanges. This aspect of inter-Korean relations has so far been overlooked despite the fact that majority of South and North Koreans only have the chance to experience contact with their counterparts across

the border indirectly through communication about the experiences of others rather than participating in exchanges directly.

The article is structured as follows. First, we offer an overview of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges from a historical perspective. Second, we explain the theories of change in inter-Korean exchanges, particularly the phenomenon of ripple effects, and propose research hypotheses. Third, we explain our experimental design and methodology. Fourth, we present our results, followed by discussion and conclusion.

Background of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges

In 1945, upon Japan's defeat in the Second World War, the United States and Soviet Union agreed to divide the Korean Peninsula into two across the 38th Parallel to prevent Korea from falling under the sphere of influence of one another. Each side solidified this division by creating its own government, rather than a unified government, in 1948. As hope for consensual unification faded, North Korea, under Kim Il-sung, attempted to unify the two Koreas by force, which led to the Korean War in 1950. The war ended with a ceasefire and without a peace agreement in 1953 at approximately where it began. This made the 38th Parallel a more concrete dividing line with virtually no cross-border exchanges for decades to come.

Each side banned citizens from exchanges with their counterparts across the border. Citizens in both countries have been subjected to years of antagonization and dehumanization of the other Korea through education (Lee, 2000; Oh, 2020), media and cultural products (Choi, 2009; Jeon, 2014; Kim and Michell, 2019; Lee, 2015b), social media (Park, 2022; Park et al., 2021; Park and Lim, 2020), and official discourses (Oh, 2011). Lack of direct or extended contact (e.g. South Koreans seeing another South Korean meeting a North Korean) and meaningful parasocial contact (e.g. South Koreans being exposed to North Koreans through videos) exacerbated such dehumanization and othering of one another.

Against this background, the two Koreas agreed to allow a small number of people-to-people exchanges in the early 1990s, following the end of Cold War. However, these exchanges did not take place in a systematic way until the first two progressive presidents' terms from 1998 to 2008 in South Korea (Ayhan and Kim, 2021).

According to the South Korean Ministry of Unification's (2019) classification, there are three kinds of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges: humanitarian aid, the Kaesong industrial complex, and social and cultural exchanges. We focus on the last, since it is the one where two Koreans meet each other on more equal footing (Ayhan and Jang, 2022), which is a prerequisite for meaningful contact (Allport, 1954).

Theories of change in inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges and the ripple effects

A theory of change explains how and why a desired change happens in a given context. Policymakers frame problems, design an intervention to address problems, facilitate the intervention through various processes, and then assess whether the outcome aligns with the original purpose. For example, previous research has examined theory of change in peace workshops to build trust and empathy in Greek-Turkish relationships (Çuhadar et al., 2015) and in policymaking to improve cultural competence in Tunisia (Zemrani et al., 2020).

In the South Korean context, governments since Roh Tae-Woo (1988–1993) have argued that years of division of the Korean peninsula have led to problematic alienation and antagonization

between the Koreans on each side of the border (Ministry of Unification, 2000: 188, 2002: 1, 2009: 14; Roh, 1988). This discord became increasingly institutionalized. Governments have suggested interventions to address this problem by facilitating inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges to increase goodwill and mutual understanding between the two Koreans, to lessen psychological distance, to reduce the possibility of war, and to prepare the two countries for the ultimate goal of reunification (Ministry of Unification, 1998: 177, 2000: 185).

This rhetoric since the 1990s framed the problem and the interventions to address the problem in an almost unified way (Ayhan and Jang, 2022). Conservative governments, however, halted the facilitation of interventions by very rarely approving people-to-people social and cultural exchanges. This resulted in a very small number of direct interactions between the two Koreans in the three decades of formalization and legalization of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges (Ayhan and Kim, 2021). Therefore, evaluating visible effects of exchanges on inter-Korean relations became impossible. Lack of observations prevents testing whether more inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges lessens conflict between the two Koreas.

The observation challenge moves us toward adjusting the theory of change from direct contact, as in previous research, to the ripple effects of people-to-people exchanges, since the latter has been more feasible and realistic in the last three decades of inter-Korean interactions. Therefore, we investigate whether indirect exposure to inter-Korean exchanges lead to the expected outcomes of these exchanges. We align our research with the expected outcomes of inter-Korean exchanges as well as social identity theory, contact theory, and conflict resolution studies.

Effects of intergroup contact

An ingroup comprises individuals with a shared identity, interest, or experience, whereas an outgroup includes people who do not belong to that particular ingroup. Studies about intergroup communication and social identity suggest that people are inclined to favor ingroups at the expense of outgroups, no matter how minimal or meaningless the groups are (Tajfel, 1974). When an ingroup and outgroup lack meaningful contact between them, prejudices, or demeaning, biased views, become exacerbated and then can become structuralized over time (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 276–277).

Allport (1954) published seminal research about intergroup contact, also known as the contact hypothesis or contact theory. This work posits that positive intergroup contact reduces prejudice and bias. Positive intergroup contact is mainly about direct interpersonal communication that takes place based on shared interests, equal opportunity to participate, and cooperative interdependency (Allport, 1954: 281; Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 77; Pettigrew, 1991).

Superordinate identification

Previous research contends that intergroup contact contributes to the development of positive attitudes toward outgroup members—but this change occurs at the interpersonal, micro-level (Çuhadar et al., 2015). A remaining task is generalizing changes to the intergroup, macro-level (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 277–279; Pettigrew, 1998). One strategy for generalizing to the intergroup level, which is relevant to this study, involves recategorizing identities of both groups from smaller identities (e.g. North Korean and South Korean) to a superordinate identity (e.g. Korean) (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 277–278). Another strategy, also relevant to our study, encompasses gaining a more complex understanding of the outgroups by learning about or observing the positive contacts of ingroups and outgroups, also known as extended contact (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 277–278;

Wright et al., 1997). Previous research asserts that extended contact reduces intergroup biases and prejudices (Wright et al., 1997).

Building on this theoretical background, and given the limited number of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges that occur, we focused on extended contact, albeit diffused, through exposure to the experiences of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges that emphasize realization of North Koreans as complex humans as well as shared superordinate identity.

Humanization

People humanize by attributing human qualities (e.g. intelligence, language, complex feelings, etc.) to the self and to ingroup members. Dehumanization is conceptualized as viewing individuals, often outgroup members, as less than human or even as inhuman (Haslam and Loughnan, 2012). Previous studies connect negative emotions toward an outgroup and perceptions of outgroup members as less human than ingroup members (Dalsklev and Kunst, 2015; Hodson, Kteily, and Hoffarth M, 2014). For example, Dalsklev and Kunst (2015) experimentally investigated how media portrayals of an ethnic outgroup elicit feelings of disgust, which in turn predict dehumanization. Disgust and the associated need to protect oneself from contamination is a driving emotion toward dehumanization. Conversely, people tend to experience more positive emotions vis-à-vis ingroups than outgroups.

Herein, following Rodríguez-Pérez et al. (2011: 679), we conceptualized humanization as "[t]he ability to experience secondary emotions (i.e. love, sorrow) . . . as opposed to primary emotions (i.e. happiness, sadness)." In other words, the presence of the secondary emotions of love and sorrow indicates that people humanize individuals (Rodríguez-Pérez et al., 2011). Humanization in turn reduces prejudice (Pavetich and Stathi, 2021). However, random or artificial creation of intergroup situations does not necessarily result in increased humanization; rather, meaningful connections and identification increase positive emotions and, thus, humanization (Demoulin et al., 2009). This is a challenge in our diffuse experimental setting, but if this diffuse treatment creates a humanization effect, it is safe to assume that more meaningful interactions would amplify such effect.

H1: Respondents with more superordinate identification will humanize North Koreans more than respondents with less superordinate identification.

Empathy

Positive intergroup contact increases affective and cognitive empathy (the latter is also known as perspective taking) vis-à-vis the other group; it also leads to the realization of commonalities (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011; Pettigrew, 1986; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel et al., 1971). Empathy in particular serves as a proxy to common identification (Lookadoo, 2017) and to diminished prejudice (Banas et al., 2020; Vescio et al., 2003). Empathy functions as the foundation for collaboration (Zaki, 2019) and allows individuals to situate themselves and outgroup members in the same category (Harwood, 2017).

Herein we conceptualize empathy as sensitivity, understanding, and rapport toward an outgroup. Empathy is a cognitive state (e.g. "I can understand how certain political issues might upset North Korean people") as well as an affective condition (e.g. "I cannot continue to feel okay if a North Korean is upset" and "It upsets and bothers me to see a North Korean person who is helpless and in need").

Other scholars have noted greater empathy and perspective taking as outcomes of intergroup contact during peace workshops. For example, Malhotra and Liyanage (2005) evaluated the development of empathy during a peace intervention between Sinhalese (mostly Buddhist) and Tamils (mostly Hindu) in Sri Lanka; participants showed more empathy toward members of the other ethnicity. Çuhadar et al. (2015) assessed a Greek-Turkish peace project to measure empathy toward members of the other ethnic group; results suggest a positive relationship between intergroup contact and empathy. Finseraas and Kotsadam (2017) investigated Norwegians' direct personal contact with ethnic minorities; results establish a positive correlation between interactions and attitudes toward immigrants' work ethics but interactions do not affect support for welfare policy. Carrell et al. (2015) found support for the contact hypothesis by examining interactions between white Americans and African-American peers.

H2: Respondents with more superordinate identification will have more empathy toward North Koreans than respondents with less superordinate identification.

Prejudicial attitudes

Prejudices are multifaceted negative assumptions, feelings, or attitudes toward others based on perceived group membership. Prejudices are rooted in biases and often lead toward disparaging views. Prejudices can intensify when meaningful intergroup contact wanes (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 276–277). Frequent positive intergroup contact, even extended contact, can reduce prejudices (Wright et al., 1997). However, negative intergroup contact has potential to enhance prejudices (Árnadóttir et al., 2018; Kotzur and Wagner, 2021; Laurence and Bentley, 2018; Stephan and Stephan, 2000).

H3: Respondents with more superordinate identification will have less prejudicial attitudes toward North Koreans than respondents with less superordinate identification.

Support for policies related to North Korea

Building on the South Korean government's expected outcomes from inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges, we also investigate whether superordinate identification leads to increased support for facilitating more inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges (Ministry of Unification, 2007: 18) as well as increased support for reunification of two Koreas (Ministry of Unification, 2000: 181).

H4: Respondents with more superordinate identification will support engagement policies vis-a-vis North Korea more than respondents with less superordinate identification.

H5: Respondents with more superordinate identification are more willing to support unification between South Korea respondents with less superordinate identification.

Methodology

Participants

The pilot test used panels recruited by Macromill Embrain (www.embrain.com), one of the largest research firms in Korea, with quota sampling based on gender, age, and region according to

resident registration population data from the Ministry of the Interior and Safety as of March 2021. The sample consisted of 220 participants (114 males and 106 females) aged 25–59 years ($M = 40.59$, $SD = 10.98$) in all regions of South Korea (Seoul and Gyeonggi province: 52.7%, Others: 47.3%).[2] One treatment group and one control group were collected through the same population ratio. On average, participants were college/university graduates ($SD = 0.93$) with incomes between 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 Korean won ($SD = .86$); participants were slightly conservative (1: very progressive to 7: very conservative, $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.89$).

The main study also used panels of Macromill Embrain with quota sampling with the same criteria. The pilot test respondents were excluded. In the pre-test, a total of 2600 participants were recruited and analyzed. There were 932 males and 868 females aged 20–59 years ($M = 40.50$, $SD = 10.82$) in all regions of South Korea (Seoul and Gyeonggi province: 52.8%, Others: 47.2%). On average, participants were college/university graduates ($SD = 0.95$) who earn income between 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 Korean won ($SD = 0.87$); they were slightly conservative (1: very progressive to 7: very conservative, $M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.12$).

Of the total participations, 1800 also participated in the post-test. The post-test respondents included 114 males and 106 females aged 25–59 years ($M = 40.59$, $SD = 10.98$) in all regions of South Korea (Seoul and Gyeonggi province: 52.7%, Others: 47.3%). On average, they were college/university graduate ($SD = 0.94$) who earn income between 3,000,000 to 5,000,000 Korean won ($SD = 0.87$), and they are slightly conservative (1: very progressive to 7: very conservative, $M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.13$).

Materials

We generated two videos both of which were narrated by a South Korean man who participated in several inter-Korean exchanges. Both videos were 10 minutes long. In the video shown to the treatment group, the man talked about how South and North Koreans share the same social identity. He explained his experiences and participation in numerous inter-Korean social and cultural people-to-people exchange projects. In this manner, the superordinate identification was manipulated by exposure to a video that emphasizes co-ethnic identity between South and North Koreans. The control group watched the same South Korean man talking about an unrelated topic (COVID-19 era solidarity messages delivered via subway announcements in South Korea).

Pilot test

In the pilot test, we had 220 participants who were equally divided into treatment and control groups. The two groups watched the aforementioned videos, one emphasizing superordinate identification between South and North Koreans, the other an unrelated content, respectively. Reliability values of composed dependent variables were checked. Cronbach's alpha values of dependent variables ranged from .458 to .891. To increase the low reliability of inter-Korea exchange support ($\alpha = .458$), revision was made to one item and answer options.

To evaluate the manipulation of superordinate identification, participants in the experimental and control groups reported to what extent they perceive South and North Koreans as sharing superordinate identification after their exposures to the respective videos narrated by a South Korean participant in inter-Korean exchanges. Three items measured superordinate identification. Two items asked to what extent they agree that South and North Koreans are the same people and that they have many commonalities; a 4-point scale (0 = disagree strongly to 4 = agree strongly) was used. One item asked to what extent they think that South and North Koreans share the same identity; a 5-point scale (0 = not at all to 4 = a lot) was used. Scale reliability was high ($\alpha = .692$). The

results indicate that the manipulation in the pilot test was ineffective: Exposure to the video did not generate perception of superordinate identification. The experimental group that watched the video narrated by a South Korean man who emphasized superordinate identification between South and North Koreans ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.56$) did not feel more superordinate identification compared to the control group who watched an unrelated video ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.62$), $t\ (218) = .718$, $p = 0.473$. This means that unlike the intention of the study, exposure to the video one time, in the pilot test, did not generate superordinate identification. The results also indicate no difference in any dependent variables between the experimental group and the control group, $p > 0.05$.

Based on these pilot test results, we exposed the treatment group to the videos twice during the post-test phase to successfully increase the perception of superordinate identification for the main study. This is because the attitudes and cognitive dimensions of the participants are more likely to change more favorably upon repeated exposure of similar or identical messages (Rice et al., 2012). The attribution theory contends that the type of information source and its perceived credibility can have a greater persuasive effect than the repeated exposure of the message (Dou et al., 2012). However, in situations where the respondents do not know the identity of the source of information, repeated exposure of the message can increase the persuasiveness of the message. In other words, increasing exposure to the messages regarding inter-Korean superordinate identity can be seen as an important precedent factor in forming people's opinions on the message.

Experimental design

In the pre-test survey, we had 2600 participants who were equally and randomly divided into control and treatment groups. They answered the survey questions then, watched the aforementioned videos (Appendix). Of them 1800 also participated in the post-test, 900 in each group. The treatment group watched the video, emphasizing superordinate identification between South and North Koreans and the control group watched an unrelated content. In the post-test, the respondents answered the survey questions after watching the videos.

Measures

Humanization of North Koreans. We adapted a complexity scale from Rodríguez-Pérez et al. (2011) to measure South Koreans' humanization of North Koreans. Respondents rated two items to evaluate to what extent they felt certain emotions (love and sorrow) when they think about North Koreans, using 7-point scales (1 = none of this feeling to 7 = a lot of this feeling).

Empathy. Participants responded to three items to measure the empathy they have toward North Koreans. The two items from Malhotra and Liyanage (2005) include "I cannot continue to feel okay if a North Korean is upset" and "it upsets and bothers me to see a North Korean person who is helpless and in need." We also adopted an item from Çuhadar et al. (2015) which asks to what extent participants understand how certain political issues may upset North Korean people. The items were measured based on 4-point scales (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) based on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree).

Prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea. Participants rated five semantic items that indicate prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea based on 7-point bipolar adjective scales (ugly-beautiful, bad-good, unpleasant-pleasant, dishonest-honest, awful-nice) adapted from Kim (2003).

Table 1. Reliability results.

Variables (number of items)	Cronbach alpha	
	Pre-test	Post-test
Superordinate identification (3)	0.681	0.714
Humanization of North Koreans (2)	0.746	0.806
Empathy (3)	0.738	0.777
Prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea (5)	0.904	0.923
Support for inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges (2)	0.704	0.757

Support of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges. Two items measured support for inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges. Participants were asked about their willingness to participate in people-to-people exchanges with North Koreans based on 5-point scales (1 = not at all to 5 = a lot). They were also asked to what extent they think the scope of inter-Korean exchange should be increased based on a 5-point scale (1 = reduce a lot to 5 = decrease a lot).

Support for unification. Support for unification was measured with an item that asked to what extent they support unification despite the economic costs to South Korea based on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly not support to 5 = strongly support). Table 1 shows the reliability scores of the manipulation questions and composed dependent variables, suggesting that they are acceptable or high in reliability.

Data analysis

SPSS statistics 2.7 was used for statistical analysis. After outlier removal, independent *t*-tests were conducted to compare the treatment group and control group for the pre-test and the post-test. Paired-*t* tests were employed to compare treatment groups in the pre-test and the post-test.

Results

Treatment vs control groups in the pre-test

We employed independent *t*-tests to compare experiment and control groups on the perceptions of humanization toward North Koreans, empathy toward North Koreans, prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea, unification support, and exchange support. As expected, none of the variables was significant in terms of the differences between the experiment and control groups ($p > 0.05$). These results show that both groups were randomized well (Table 2).

Treatment vs control groups in the post-test

Before testing hypotheses, we checked the manipulation by measuring our main construct of interest (Ejelöv and Luke, 2020), which is superordinate identification with North Koreans. The results show that the manipulation was effective. As intended, the treatment group ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.62$) felt more superordinate identification with North Koreans compared to the control group ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.62$), and the statistical difference was significant, $t(1738) = 2.527$, $p = 0.012$.

We conducted independent *t*-tests to compare treatment and control groups in the post-test on the dependent variables (Table 3).

Table 2. Comparing perceptions and attitudes toward North Korea between experimental and control groups in the pre-test.

Dependent variable	Experimental group	Control group	*t*	95% CI	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*		Lower	Upper
Humanization	3.46 (1.37)	3.43(1.38)	0.626	–0.072	0.139
Empathy	2.53 (0.59)	2.51(0.56)	1.173	–0.017	0.071
Prejudicial Attitude	–0.32 (1.08)	–0.40 (1.07)	1.923	–0.001	0.164
Exchange support	3.10 (0.83)	3.08 (0.84)	0.606	–0.044	0.084
Unification support	3.11 (1.17)	3.06 (1.19)	1.058	–0.042	0.140

CI: confidence interval; SD: standard deviation.

Table 3. Comparing perceptions and attitudes toward North Korea between experimental and control groups in the post-test.

Dependent Variable	Experimental Group	Control Group	*t*	95% CI	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*		Lower	Upper
Humanization	3.64 (1.33)	3.48(1.38)	2.476*	0.033	0.288
Empathy	2.51 (0.60)	2.47(0.61)	1.471	–0.014	0.100
Prejudicial Attitude	–0.22 (1.10)	–0.31 (1.09)	1.737	–0.011	0.195
Exchange support	3.09 (0.84)	3.04 (0.86)	1.159	–0.033	0.128
Unification support	3.11 (1.15)	3.06 (1.16)	0.830	–0.063	0.155

CI: confidence interval; SD: standard deviation.
*$p < 0.05$.

As H1 predicted, treatment group respondents ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.33$) humanize North Koreans more than respondents in the control group ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.38$), $t(1738) = 2.476$, $p = 0.013$. Thus, H1 was supported. However, contrary to H2, there were no significant differences between the experimental group and control group in the level of empathy toward North Koreans, $t(1738) = 1.471$, $p = 0.141$. There was a marginally significant difference between experiment and control groups in prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea. Respondents in the control group had more prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea ($M = -0.31$, $SD = 1.09$) than respondents in the experimental group ($M = -0.22$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(1738) = 1.737$, $p = 0.083$. Thus, H3 was partially supported. The results found no significant differences between the experimental condition ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.84$) and the control condition ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.86$) in support of increasing inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges, $t(1738) = 1.159$, $p = 0.247$. Thus, H4 was not supported. Support for unification did not differ between the experiment ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.15$) and control groups ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(1738) = .830$, $p = 0.407$. Hence, H5 was not supported.

Treatment group pre-test vs post-test

We conducted a series of paired *t*-tests to compare the pre-test of the experimental group who participated in the post-test with the post-test experimental group that was exposed twice to the experiences of an inter-Korean exchange participant (Table 4).

Table 4. Comparing perceptions and attitudes toward North Korea between pre-and post-tests experimental groups.

Dependent Variable	Pre-test	Post-test	*t*	95% CI	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*		Lower	Upper
Humanization	3.42 (1.35)	3.64 (1.33)	5.538***	0.120	0.253
Empathy	2.52 (0.57)	2.51 (0.60)	–0.841	–0.094	0.038
Prejudicial Attitude	–0.35 (1.03)	–0.22(1.10)	4.562***	0.087	0.220
Exchange support	3.09 (0.81)	3.09 (0.84)	–0.184	–0.072	0.060
Unification support	3.10 (1.16)	3.11 (1.15)	0.085	–0.063	0.069

CI: confidence interval; SD: standard deviation.
***$p < 0.001$.

As H1 expected, following more superordinate identification with North Koreans, respondents humanized North Koreans relatively more ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.33$) than before ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.35$). This difference, .216, was statistically significant, $t(880) = 5.538$, $p = 0.000$. The results also indicate that respondents' empathy toward North Koreans was not increased following more superordinate identification with North Koreans ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.60$) compared to before ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.57$), $t(880) = -.841$, $p = 0.401$. Thus, H2 was not supported. Respondents' prejudicial attitudes toward North Koreans were improved following more superordinate identification with North Koreans ($M = -0.22$, $SD = 1.10$) in comparison to their prejudicial attitudes before ($M = -0.35$, $SD = 1.03$). This difference, 0.12, was statistically significant, supporting H3, $t(880) = 4.562$, $p = 0.000$. Support for increasing inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges also did not differ significantly between the post-test group ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.84$) and the pre-test group ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.81$), $t(880) = -.184$, $p = 0.854$. Hence, H4 was not supported. The results indicate no significant difference between the post-test group ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.15$) and the pre-test group ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.16$) in support of unification, $t(880) = .085$, $p = 0.933$. Therefore, H5 was not supported.

Discussion

Our results show that even extended and diffuse exposure to inter-Korean social and cultural people-to-people exchanges (e.g. merely listening to the experience of a fellow South Korean in a 10-minute video twice) can help to reduce antagonization toward North Koreans by facilitating realization of commonalities based on shared identities of being human and being Koreans. In that sense, our research provides support for the arguments that social identity recategorization can happen through extended and diffuse exposure to intergroup contact. This is a significant finding since designing experiments with both sides' direct participation in conflict resolution may be virtually impossible (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 286). Indeed, in the case of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges, neither the experimental participation of North Koreans nor the documentation of actual exchanges through video recordings for experimental use is feasible.

The experiment manipulation was successful in the post-test of the main experiment. In other words, as predicted, exposure to a South Korean's experiences with inter-Korean people-to-people exchange increased South Koreans' superordinate identification with the North Korean outgroup. Our experimental design aligns with the social identity theory and contact theory that expect increased realization of commonalities and relatively more superordinate identification with the outgroup following positive direct or extended positive contacts.

However, a word of caution in interpreting the results is necessary. In our study, we did not stratify South Korean participants based on their prior level of group identification with South or North Korea, which could be a confounding variable in generating a superordinate identity recategorization (Crisp et al., 2006). Nevertheless, the random assignment of participants into control and treatment groups likely offset this potential confounding problem.

A caveat in our study involves the 10-minute video stimulus: watching the video once was ineffective in the pilot test, but increasing exposure by showing the video two times in a span of 2 weeks during the main experiment produced the expected manipulation, that is, increased superordinate identification with North Koreans.

Our research design enabled us to validate the results by comparing the differences between treatment and control groups and the differences within the treatment group in pre- and post-test phases. All of the results in both cases confirmed each other.

As expected, the extended and diffuse nature of exposure to inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges is enough to generate more superordinate identification with the outgroup. The social identity recategorization of North Korean and South Korean into a superordinate Korean identity concurs with perceiving the outgroup in a more positive way. Furthermore, the ripple effects of inter-Korean social and cultural people-to-people exchanges in extended and diffuse contact are apparent in humanizing the outgroup and decreasing prejudicial attitudes against the outgroup. However, contrary to the results of previous research about direct intergroup contact, such limited exposure did not generate empathy toward the outgroup, support for increasing inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges, nor support for unification.

The lack of support for unification may be due to the changing context of inter-Korean relations. Political divergences between South and North Korea have become so deep that increased positive attitudes toward North Koreans or superordinate identification with them does not seem to result in increased support for unification (c.f., Ha and Jang, 2016). These findings align with Einhorn and Rich's empirical research (2021) in which they found no relation between co-ethnic identity and support for unification.

We found support for South Koreans' increased superordinate identification with North Koreans after indirect contact with alienated and, to some extent, antagonized North Koreans; this contact facilitated humanization. This finding supports anecdotal evidence that South Korean participants in inter-Korean exchanges realize that North Koreans are also the same human beings with similar anxieties and life goals as South Koreans (Ayhan and Jang, 2022). In a similar vein, comparative prejudicial attitudes toward North Koreans also decline as a result of South Koreans' increased superordinate identification with North Koreans.

Our results have implications for the South Korean government's policies toward inter-Korean exchanges. Even with very limited contact, South Koreans realize more superordinate identification with North Koreans; this limited contact works toward achieving the South Korean government's aim to reduce alienation and antagonism through inter-Korean exchanges. Based on these results, we suggest increasing ordinary South Koreans' exposure to commonalities with North Koreans. Communication about North Koreans as complex humans and about the superordinate Korean identity can help to reduce alienation and antagonism on the Korean Peninsula. Such messaging can happen through extended contact with North Koreans: Those with firsthand experiences of the commonalities between the two Koreans through engagement in inter-Korean exchanges can function as credible conduits. However, traditional media and social media also play a role in facilitating social identity recategorization since most people are exposed to information through media rather than directly from the government or from government-appointed spokespersons.

More importantly, increasing the scale of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges would directly expose more South Koreans, and automatically more North Koreans, to commonalities. Social and cultural exchanges facilitate Koreans from the two sides meeting on an equal level and, thus, are preferred (in comparison to other types of people-to-people exchanges such as humanitarian aid or Kaesong Industrial Complex) for amplifying and sustaining the aforementioned effects toward increased superordinate identification.

Conclusion and suggestions for further research

Due to the limits on inter-Korean interactions since the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945, only a small number of individuals have been authorized to engage in limited exchanges. In this instance, the current study employed an experimental design to determine if exchange participants' experiences provide new possibilities to comprehend the impact of people-to-people activities and reduce negative views about North Koreans. We also study, from the perspective of social identity, whether superordinate identification promotes support for interpersonal connections and unity.

Our results are limited to the ripple effects of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges that strengthen the superordinate identity within the South Korean context. Previous studies, however, also employed similar research designs involving only ingroup members (Çuhadar and Dayton, 2011: 286). Herein the extended contact is also diffuse in the sense that the experiment participants do not watch South and North Koreans engaging in positive interpersonal contact, but only listen to and learn from someone who shared his experiences through an interview-like video. This diffuse nature of extended contact is likely to diminish the effect hypothesized in extended contact theory. However, we expect that exposure to inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges in North Korea may facilitate similar superordinate identification effects, and thereby reduce alienation and antagonization vis-à-vis South Koreans.

Future studies should try to increase participant exposure by showing more and diverse videos related to the commonalities of South and North Koreans as humans and as Koreans. The videos could either relay real participant experiences within inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges or describe commonalities through narration. The differences between the former and latter can also increase knowledge about the ripple effects of people-to-people exchanges in generating superordinate identification in addition to the effects of narratives about commonalities.

Furthermore, future studies should try to direct interpersonal exchanges, although the technical and legal challenges may prove too difficult. One way to accomplish such could be through an experimental design in which South Koreans have direct exchanges with North Korean refugees who pretend to be typical North Koreans and not refugees. However, receiving legal approvals and IRB approvals for such a study may be problematic. Indeed, the latter was our plan for this study, but we could not even attempt IRB approval due to COVID-19 social distancing and quarantine regulations in South Korea (and by extension North Korea).

Future studies should design experiments based on actual media coverage and/or social media content related to commonalities between South and North Koreans. This mediated communication could be presented through the experiences of those with prior involvement in inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges to test whether exposure through traditional media and social media also creates the ripple effects.

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Notes

1. From a legal perspective, North Koreans in South Korea are neither immigrants nor refugees since South Korean constitution considers North Korea to be a part of its state. However, in practice, they are akin to refugees and immigrants in South Korea.
2. For those who are interested in the survey data used for the pilot test, pre- and post-test of the main experiment, please refer to the first author's website at https://github.com/kjayhan/superordinate_korean. The SPSS files and the survey questionnaire are available on the website.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

Demographic characteristics

1. What is your gender?
   __Male
   __Female
   __Other (please specify)

2. How old are you?

   _____

3. What is your highest level of education completed?

   __ Did Not Complete High School
   __ High School
   __ Some College
   __ Bachelor's Degree
   __ Master's Degree
   __ Ph.D.

4. What is your approximate average household monthly income, including any incentives, bank interests, or other extra earnings?

   __ Under 3,000,000 won
   __ Above 3,000,000 won—under 5,000,000 won
   __ Above 5,000,000 won—under 10,000,000 won
   __ Above 10,000,000 won

5. Please indicate your political ideology (1 = very progressive to 7 = very conservative):

   ____

6. Where do you mainly live? (Select one place)

____Seoul/Gyeonggi/Incheon
____Kangwon
____Gyeongsang
____Jeonra
____ Chungcheong
____Jeju
____Overseas

7. What is your occupation?

____Student
____Self-employed/CEO
____Professionals
____Managerial works
____Office worker (Companies/government agencies)
____CEO
____Agricultural/forestry/fisheries/livestock industry
____Technicians
____Not employed
____Others

Exposure to inter-Korean experiences

8. Have you participated in inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges?

____Yes
____No

9. How much have you listened to or read about anyone who participated in inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges talk about their experiences through the media (e.g. newspapers, TV, radio, magazines, or any other media)?

____Yes
____No

10. Have you been to North Korea?

____Yes
____No

11. Have you met any North Koreans (those who are not defectors)?

____Yes
____No

12. Have you met any North Korean defectors?

____Yes
____No

13. How much do you think you know about what life is like for North Koreans?

____Yes
____No

Humanization of North Koreans
Please rate how much you have the following feelings when you think of North Korean (0: weaker feeling to 6: stronger feeling).
14. Love
15. Sorrow

Superordinate identity
How much do you agree with the following statements?
(Strongly disagree/Disagree /Agree/Strongly agree)

16. South and North Koreans are the same human beings.
17. South and North Koreans have a lot of commonalities.
18. To what extent do you feel that you share a common Korean identity with North Koreans?

Empathy
19. I cannot continue to feel okay if a North Korean is upset.
20. It upsets and bothers me to see a North Korean person who is helpless and in need.
21. I can understand how certain political issues might upset North Korean people.

Prejudicial attitudes toward North Korea
(-3: weaker feeling to + 3: stronger feeling)
Please rate how much you have the following feelings when you think of North Korea:

22. ugly-beautiful,
23. bad-good,
24. unpleasant-pleasant,
25. dishonest-honest,
26. awful-nice

Support of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges
27. How willing are you to participate in people-to-people exchanges with North Koreans? (1: not at all to 5: a lot)

28. Since 2008, 19 inter-Korean social and cultural cooperation projects took place. Do you think the scope of inter-Korean people-to-people exchanges should be:
(Increased a lot, Increased a little, Left the same, Decreased a little, Decreased a lot, Don't know)

Support for unification

29. I support unification despite economic costs to South Korea. (strongly disagree: 1 to strongly agree: 5)

Open-ended question

30. The expert who narrated in the video talks about social and cultural people-to-people exchanges between North and South Korea. What are your thoughts on inter-Korean people-to-people social and cultural exchanges?